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a mystery story

By SEABURY QUINN

October
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The Heart of Siva

By SEABURY QUINN

A startling weird mystery tale of eery murders and the gruesome fate of the dancers in the Ballet Russe—a tale of Hindoo fanaticism

"IS THERE a doctor in the house?" Sharp-toned, almost breathless, the query cut through the sussuration of comment following the second divertissement offered by the Issatakko Ballet Russe. The gay, chattering buzz-buzz of conversation which characterizes every audience during the entr'acte was hushed to a barely audible, curious murmur which rippled from lip to lip: "What is it? What's happened? Is it ——"

"Here, *Monsieur le Directeur!*" Jules de Grandin announced, rising in his chair and seizing me by the shoulder. "Here are two of us; we come at once.

"Your pardon, *Mesdames, Messieurs,*" he added to our neighbors as, regardless of the toes he trampled and the shins he kicked, he forced his way to the aisle, dragging me behind him, and made swiftly for the passageway leading backstage from the rear of the lower tier of boxes.

"And now, *Monsieur,* what is it, if you please?" he asked as the iron-sheathed fire-door clanged shut behind us and we found ourselves in the dim-lit, mysterious space behind the wings.

"One of our girls, Mam'selle Niki," the perspiring manager half gulped, half gasped, mopping a dew of glistening, oily moisture from the top of his pink and hairless head with a crumpled white-silk handkerchief. "She was due to go on in the next number—Flora, who shares her room, had already come down and was waiting, but Niki didn't answer the bell, and when we sent for her we found she hadn't even begun to change. She's had a seizure of some sort, I'm afraid. If you'll come with me, please, gentlemen——"

He turned toward a winding spiral of iron stairs, his bald head gleaming in the subdued rays of a cage-protected electric light, the breath wheezing with oily sibilance between fat lips.

De Grandin and I followed as best we could, picking our path between masses of scenery, across coiling, serpent-like electric cables, winding our way up the twisting stairs, and finally coming to pause before a narrow metal door on which our guide knocked sharply. No answer being received, he thrust the portal open and stood aside to let us enter.

The cubicle into which we stepped was reminiscent in shape, size and general appearance of a cell in one of our more modern jails. Cement walls dressed with rough-cast plaster bore penciled sketches of girls' heads, with occasional more intimate details of anatomy, accompanied here and there by snatches of decidedly un-Tennysonian verse. A cluster of electric lights set in the ceiling gave brilliant illumination to a narrow, unpainted table with two make-up boxes on it.

Crumpled on the floor before the second make-up box lay a girl. As nearly as I could determine at first glance, she was clothed in a sleazy rayon kimono figured with atrocious caricatures of green fla-

"Like a pouncing cat he leaped across the floor, his flashlight playing steadily upon a tiny cord-like coil."

mingos feeding from a purple pool. For the rest, bracelets, bell-hung anklets and breast-boxes of imitation silver set with glass jewels and ear- and nose-rings of pinchbeck seemed to complete her costume. Her slim, bare body was smeared with umber grease-paint in simulation of a Hindoo woman's sunburnt skin, and a small, red caste mark set between her eyes completed the illusion, but where the coarse-haired wig of black had slipped from her forehead there showed a thin line of pallid scalp and a straying tendril of fine, light hair, proclaiming her a natural blond.

Flaccid as a cast-off rag doll she lay, one arm grotesquely doubled underneath her, the other, laden with its loops of imitation jewelry, extended toward us, slender, dark-stained fingers with strawberry-tinted nails clutched into a little, rounded fist on which the cheap rings glittered fulgently.

De Grandin crossed the little room in two quick strides, dropped to one knee and took the girl's thin wrist between a practised thumb and finger. A moment he knelt thus, then, putting out his hand, raised her left eyelid.

"Ah-ha," the nasal, non-committal ejaculation which held no hint of laughter, yet somehow conveyed an implication of grim humor that told me he had found something; something wholly unexpected.

He bent again to look at her clenched hand, gently prizing the stiff fingers open, and from his waistcoat pocket produced a small lens, fitted with a collapsible tube, like a jeweler's loop, set it in his eye and raised the little, brown-stained hand, re-

garding it intently. His elbows moved, but since his back was to me I could not tell what he was doing as he bent still closer to the inert form. At length:

"*Monsieur,* this poor one doubtless has a *doublure*—an understudy?" he asked the manager.

"Why, yes, but——"

"*Très bon;* you would be advised to call her to the stage. *Mademoiselle* will not be able to appear again tonight—or ever. *Elle est morte.*"

"You—you don't mean she's——"

"Perfectly, *Monsieur;* she is dead."

"But what are we to do?—this will ruin us!" Tears of terror and self-pity welled up in the manager's rather prominent blue eyes. "This mustn't reach the papers, sir! That threat—that note——"

"*Ah-ha!*" again that nasal, enigmatic sound, half query, half challenge. "There was a note, *hein?* What did it say?"

A look of panic swept across the manager's broad face. "Note?" he repeated. "Oh, no, Doctor, you misunderstood; I was referring to a promissory note which falls due on the first. If this death becomes public we shan't be able to meet it!"

"U'm?"

"Poor Niki," the manager hurried on, obviously intent on changing the subject as quickly as might be. "She seemed so well just a few minutes ago. She must have had a seizure of some sort."

"Seizure is the word, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin agreed grimly, fixing the other with a level stare. Then:

"*Allez;* get on, begin your show. Me, I have work to do!" He fairly pushed the other from the room; then, to me:

" 'Phone for the coroner, Friend Trowbridge," he commanded. "Bid him come quickly for this poor one's body, if you please. Do you await him here, and ask him to withhold the autopsy until he hears from me. I shall be in the rear of the auditorium, awaiting you when you have done with him."

"Couldn't you determine the cause of death?" I asked curiously as he turned to leave.

"Truly, my friend; only too well."

"Why, then, can't you sign the death certificate and save Mr. Martin the bother——"

"*Mais non,* the law forbids it. This so unfortunate young woman was murdered."

"Murdered?"

"*Précisément;* most foully done to death, or I misread the signs."

I FOUND him lounging at the rear of the theater, with the studied boredom of a seasoned boulevardier when, the girl's body entrusted to Coroner Martin's custody, I quit my lonely vigil with the dead.

The third presentment of the Issatakko Ballet was in progress, depicting one of those never-ending conflicts between gods and men with which the elder religions teem. Seated beneath the outstretched branches of a tree was a young ascetic, thighs doubled under him; feet, soles up, resting on his crossed calves. His head sunk low upon his breast, hands lying flat, palms up, upon his knees, he sat stone-still in silent contemplation whereby he sought to acquire mastery of the secrets of the universe and share the power of the gods.

Far away, faint as the whisper of a lilting summer zephyr, a wind arose, stirring the foliage of the tree under which the youthful yogi sat, scattering a gay cascade of ruby-tinted blossoms over him. The crouching figure sat immobile.

Now the wind lifted and the great trees bowed their heads in terror as the Storm King drove his chariot across the sky. Black clouds piled menacingly, bank on bank, obscuring every shaft of light which

shot down through the forest, and spears of vivid lightning stabbed the darkness while the thunder roared a fierce, continuous cannonade. Still the yogi sat in moveless contemplation.

Then suddenly a blaze of light effaced the gathering shadows and upon a dais we saw the seated form of Siva, the Destroyer. Cross-legged sat the god, feet doubled under him; the lithe body, gleaming like burnished bronze, bare from soles to brow, save where great bands of gold encircled ankles, waist and wrists, and where a heavy collar of dull gold, thick-set with carven coral, rested round the neck. Upon the head was reared a coronet of seven leaping flames, and between the eyes was set the caste-mark of the followers of Siva. Plainly, it was a girl who impersonated the dread third person of the Indian Trimutri, but by ingenious use of lights and draperies perspective was so altered that a second girl behind the first was totally invisible, save where her arms were thrust to right and left beneath the other's, giving a perfect illusion of a human form with four pectoral limbs. Each hand of the four arms was held identically, thumbs and forefingers pressed daintily together, as though about to lift a pinch of snuff. For a moment the six-limbed form sat motionless; then as the orchestra began a soft andante, the arms began to move, rippling bonelessly from shoulder down to wrist, supple as twining serpents, fascinating as the movements of a reptile when it would put a spell upon its prey.

Some moments this endured; then, as though summoned by the eery beckoning of those reptilian hands, a bevy of girls drew near, the light reflected from the brooding deity's throne shining on their rings and belts and tinkling silver anklets. These were, I knew, the Apsaras or Houris from the Hindoo paradise, and as they neared the throne of Siva and groveled to the earth before the squatting god, their mission was made clear; for with a final gesture of its fourfold hands the deity commanded that they exercise their wiles upon the brooding yogi who took no note of storm or hurricane or the threatening bolts of lightning sent to drive him from his meditation.

The figure of the god dissolved in darkness, and with subdued gurgles of laughter the Houris formed themselves into a ring and danced about the seated mystic entreating him with every artifice of Eastern love to look upon their charms and forget his contemplation in the pleasures of the flesh. Still no response from the brooding, seated figure.

Now, covered with chagrin at failing to arouse the young man's passion, the Apsaras drew off, their arms across their faces to hide the tears of shame which started to their eyes; and suddenly the music changed. No longer was it light and gay and frolicsome, a fitting tune for little, silver-bangled feet to dance to; it was a sort of sensuous largo, a creeping, reptant, slowly moving thing instinct with subtle menace as the sinuous turnings of a snake, redolent with the sort of awful blasphemy which might attend the unclean secret worship of some band of obscene ophiolatrists.

By a clever bit of stage mechanics a shadow-spot was thrown upon the scene. That is, as a shaft of light might strike upon a darkened stage, picking out the figure of the actor upon which it rested, there was now centered a spot of shadow in the midst of light, and in this, slowly, with a sinuousness which raised the hair upon my head with the age-old, atavistic fear of all warm-blooded creatures for the snake, there danced — or rather writhed—a figure.

She was not nude. Had she been so, the lewd obscenity of her would have been less repulsive. Instead she wore a

skin-tight costume of fine net, transparent as air across the front, save where patches of black, green, or yellow-blue sequins were sewn upon it at breast and waist and thigh. Across the back, from waist to heels, the net was set with gleaming snake-scales, and a trailing train of the material swept upon the floor behind her. Upon each great and little toe of her feet there gleamed an emerald-studded ring, so that each step she took was like the forward-darting of a green-eyed snake, while on her arms were flesh-tight sleeves of shining scales and on her hands were mittens fashioned like the wedge-shaped heads of cobras-de-capello. Upon her head, obscuring hair and face, save for her vivid, scarlet-painted mouth, was drawn a hood of flashing emerald scales.

She was the daughter of Kadru, the snake-goddess, sent from the realm of Takshaka, the serpent-king, to do the work at which the Apsaras failed.

And well she did it!

Each movement was enticement and repulsion rolled in one; the fascinating glinting of her scales was beauty wed to horrifying menace. The slow, mesmeric movement of her hands beckoned with inducement which combined the promise of god-forbidden joys with the pledge of sure destruction. I understood, as I watched breathlessly, how it was that mankind held the serpent in a detestation bordering on loathing, yet in the days before the old gods lost their right to worship, reared altars to the snake and paid him honor with blood-sacrifice.

The young ascetic raised his eyes as the serpent-daughter circled round and round his seat of meditation. At first stark horror shone upon his face; then, slowly, came a look of wondering curiosity; at length a fascinated ecstasy of longing and desire. Her scale-clad hands danced forth to touch his cheeks, her hooded head bent toward him, and straight into his eyes she looked, red mouth provocatively parted, low laughter which was half a hiss inviting him to—*what?*

The strain was past endurance. With a wild cry of renunciation the youth sprang up, all thought of contemplation cast aside. He had looked into the eyes of the snake-woman, and looking, cast off his hope of Nirvana in favor of the promise she held out to him.

Her laughter, hard and clear as any note of silver clapper striking on a silver bell, sank lower, softened to a sibilating hiss; her scale-sheathed arms went round his quivering shoulders; her gleaming, supple body seemed to melt and merge with his, her hooded head sank forward; her flaming, blood-red mouth found his and sucked his soul away. He stiffened like a nerveless body shocked with electricity, held taut as a violin string stretched until the breaking-point is reached; then suddenly, as though the breath she drew forth from his lips were all that held him upright, he wilted. Like a candle in a superheated room, like a doll from which the sawdust has been let, like a toy balloon when punctured with a pin he wilted, dropping flaccid and lifeless in the serpent-witch's cruel embrace. And as she let his limp form sink down to the moss beneath the tree the daughter of the snake-king bent above him and laughed a low and hissing laugh, a laugh of sated cruelty and triumph blended into one, but a laugh which split and broke upon a sob as she gazed down on what had been a man.

Then the purple curtains clashed together and the lights went up. The final act of Issatakko's Ballet Russe was done.

For a long moment silence reigned within the auditorium. A program dropped, and its rustle sounded like the scuttering of frost-dried leaves across a

country churchyard in midwinter. A woman tittered half hysterically, and checked herself abruptly, as though she'd been at vespers, or at a funeral service. Then, wave on crashing wave, like breakers surging on a boulder-studded shore, applause broke forth, and for fully five minutes the theater rang with the impact of wildly clapping hands.

De Grandin struck his hands together gently, but there was no enthusiasm in his gaze as the curtains swung apart, revealing the entire Issatakko troupe lined up in acknowledgment of the ovation. Rather, it seemed to me, his eyes roved questingly about the auditorium, seeking something other than a farewell glimpse of the performers whom the audience applauded to the echo. At length:

"Do you observe them, too, my friend?" he asked, nudging me in the side with the sharp angle of a bent elbow as he nodded toward the center aisle.

I followed the direction of his nod with my glance. A party of three dark men, immaculate in faultless evening dress, correct in every detail, even to the waxen-leaved gardenias in their lapels, was walking toward the exit. The foremost man was rather under middle height and surprizingly broad across the shoulders. His arms were long, hanging nearly to his knees, and there was something simian in his rolling gait. Although his face was dark as any negro's, there was nothing negroid in his features or the straight black hair plastered smoothly to his head. Behind him walked a slightly taller man, lighter in skin, slenderer in build, and as he turned his face toward me a moment I caught a fleeting glimpse of his eyes, odd, opaque-looking eyes devoid of either luster or expression. The third man of the party was younger, thin to the point of emaciation, hairless as a mummy, despite his youth. Without quite knowing why, I was unpleasantly impressed by them.

"Now, by the nightcaps of the seven Ephesian Sleepers, one wonders," de Grandin muttered to himself.

"Wonders what?" I asked.

"Where the fourth one went, *par-bleu!*" he answered. "Five minutes—maybe six—ago, another one, almost the counterpart of that *sacré singe* who leads, left his seat and the theater. I should greatly like to know——"

"They seem men of refinement," I cut in. "Possibly they're from New York's negro colony and——"

"And perhaps they come from hell, with the taint of brimstone on their breath, which is more likely," he retorted. "Those are no negro-men, my friend; no, they are Asiatics, and Hindoos in the bargain."

"Well?" I countered, hardly knowing whether to be more exasperated than amused. "What of it?"

"*Exactement*—what?" he answered. "Come, let us go and see."

Instead of leaving by the front, he led me down the farther aisle, fumbled for a moment at the leaves of a fire-door, finally let us out into the alley leading to the stage entrance. Hastening down this narrow, tunnel-like passage he came to an angle of the wall, halted momentarily, then:

"*Ah-ha? Ah-ha-ha?*" he exclaimed sharply. "Behold, observe, my friend! I feared as much!"

Lying in a heap, her clothing disarranged, her straw-braid hat some distance from her, was a girl, motionless as an artist's lay-figure cast aside when its usefulness is done.

DE GRANDIN dropped beside her, pressed an ear against her breast, then rising quickly stripped off his dinner coat and folded it into a pad over which

he laid the girl face-down, the folded garment forming a pillow under the lower part of her chest. Kneeling across her, he pressed his hands firmly on each side of her back beneath the scapulæ, bearing down steadily while he counted slowly: "*Un—deux—trois,*" swinging back, releasing the pressure, then leaning forward, applying it again.

"Whatever are you doing?" I demanded. That he was applying the Schäfer method of resuscitation was obvious, but why he did it was a mystery to me. In nearly half a century of practise I had yet to see such treatment for a case of fainting.

"*Parbleu,* I build a house, I go to take a ride on horseback, I attend a dinner at the Foreign Office, what else?" he answered with elaborate sarcasm, continuing to exert alternating pressures on the prone girl's costal region.

A low moan and a gasp told us that the patient was responding to his treatment, and he leaped up nimbly, raised her to a sitting posture with her back against the wall, then bent down smiling.

"You are here, outside the theater, *Mademoiselle,*" he told her, anticipating the question with which nine fainting patients out of ten announce return to consciousness. "Will you tell us, if you please, exactly what occurred to you before you swooned?"

The girl raised both hands to her neck, caressing her throat gently with her finger tips. "I—I scarcely know what happened," she replied. "I had to get home early, so I went out before the *finale,* and was dressed and ready when the curtain was rung down. Just as I left the theater something seemed to—to fall on me; it seemed as though a great, soft hand had closed around my throat and two big fingers pressed beneath my ears. Then I fainted, and——"

"*Précisément, Mademoiselle,* and can you tell us if you cried for help?"

"Why, no; you see, it took me so by surprize that I just sort of gasped and——"

"Thank you, that explains it," he broke in. "I wondered how you had survived; now I understand. When you gasped in sudden terror you filled your lungs with air. Thereafter, right away, immediately, you fainted, and the muscles of your neck were utterly relaxed. Squeeze as he would, he could not quite succeed in strangling you, for your flaccid flesh offered no resistance to the pressure of his *roomal,* and the air you had inspired was enough to aerate your blood and support life until we came upon you. But it was a near thing, *cordieu*—one little minute longer, and you would have been —*pouf!*" He put his gathered thumb and fingers to his lips, and wafted a kiss upward toward the summer sky.

"But I don't understand——"

"Nor need you, *Mademoiselle.* You were set upon, you were almost done to death; but by the mercy of a kindly heaven and the prompt advent of Jules de Grandin, you were saved. May we not have the pleasure of securing a conveyance for you?"

He bowed to her with courtly Continental grace, assisting her to rise.

"And may one ask your name?" he added as we reached the avenue and I held up my stick to hail a cruising taxicab.

She turned a long, appraising look on us, taking careful stock of my bald pate fringed with whitening hair, my professional beard and conservatively cut dinner clothes, then, with brightening eyes, took in de Grandin's English-tailored suit, his trimly waxed wheat-blond mustache and sleek blond hair. With a smile which answered that which the little Frenchman turned toward her she an-

swered, "Certainly, I'm billed as Mam'-selle Toni on the program, but my real name's Helen Fisk."

"Now what?" I asked as the taxi drove away.

"First of all to see *Monsieur le Directeur;* perhaps to pull his nose; at any rate to talk to him like an uncle freshly come from Holland," he returned, leading the way back to the theater.

Monsieur Serge Orloff, managing director of Issatakko's Ballet Russe, whose real name must have been quite different from the one he bore in public, sat in sweaty and uncomfortable loneliness in the little cubicle which served him for an office. "Ah, gentlemen," he greeted as we entered, "I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you for what you did this evening. I suppose there'll be some charge for your—ah—professional assistance?" He drew a Russia leather wallet from the inside pocket of his evening coat and fingered it suggestively.

"*Monsieur,*" de Grandin told him bluntly, "I think you are a liar."

"Wha—*what?*" the other stammered. "What's that?"

"Precisely, exactly; quite so," the Frenchman answered. "That note of which you spoke when first we met. It was no note of promise, and you know it very well; you also know we know it. It was a threat—a warning of some kind, and you must let us see it. Right away, at once."

"But my dear sir——"

"To blazing hell with your dear sirs—the note, *Monsieur.*" He thrust his hand out truculently.

Orloff looked at him consideringly a moment, then with a racial shrug opened his wallet and gave the Frenchman a slip of folded paper.

"U'm?" de Grandin scanned the missive rapidly while I looked across his shoulder:

Manager, Issatakko Ballet:

Impious man, be warned that your spectacle, *La Mort d'un Yogin,* is an insult to the gods it parodies. If you would save the sacrilegious women who take part in it, and yourself, from the vengeance of the Great Destroyer, you will discontinue it at once. Death, sure and inescapable, shall be the lot of all who further this vile insult to divinity. Be warned in time and do not further brave the vengeance of the gods of India.

(Signed) THE SLAVES OF SIVA.

"What does it mean, 'the Great Destroyer'?" I asked.

"Siva," he replied, almost petulantly. "He is the third person of the Hindoo triad. Brahma, the Creator, is the first, Vishnu, the Preserver, second, and Siva, the Destroyer, the last and greatest of them all." Then, to the manager:

"This thing, when did you get it, if you please, *Monsieur?*"

"About a month ago, sir. We opened in Bridgeport, Connecticut, you know; and this note was slipped under my office door the morning following the first try-out performance."

"U'm? And has any effort been made to enforce the threat—before tonight?"

"Tonight? You don't mean Niki was a victim of——"

"Niki and Toni, too, *Monsieur.* The first was killed outright by a very clever piece of villainy; the second would have died by the strangling-handkerchief—the *roomal* of the *thags*—had I not smelt the fish and hastened to her aid, before I surely knew that she had been attacked."

"Oh, this is terrible!" Orloff fairly wailed. "I dare not let this news leak out. Oh, what *shall* I do?"

"First, *Monsieur,* you would be advised to secure police protection for your troupe. Have them—and yourself as well, well guarded while entering, leaving or within the theater——"

"But I can't do that. That would involve publicity, and——"

"Very well," the Frenchman bowed with frigid politeness. "Do as you please, *Monsieur*. I leave to hold a session at the city mortuary and"—there was no humor in the smile he turned upon the manager—"unless you act on my advice, I greatly fear that I shall see you there ere long."

"COLORED men, Why, yes, sir: there's been one of 'em buying tickets to every performance since we opened," the ticket-seller, who boasted the proud title of assistant treasurer of the Issatakko Ballet, told de Grandin as we stopped before his wicket in the lobby. "Funny thing, too; one of 'em, not always the same feller, stops here every afternoon and buys four tickets for the evening show. I don't know who he gets 'em for, but he's here each afternoon, as regular as clockwork. Always gets the best seats in the house, too."

Nodding courteous acknowledgment of the information, de Grandin sought the ticket-taker. It appeared, from what the latter had to say, that "four dinges come every evenin', an' one of 'em always runs out sort o' early, with th' other three leavin' when the show lets out."

"*Eh bien,* my friend," de Grandin told me as we set out for the city morgue, "it would seem there is a definite connection between the advent of those dark-skinned gentlemen, the note of warning which so disturbed Monsieur Orloff, and the death of that unfortunate young woman in her dressing-room tonight. *N'est-ce-pas?*"

CORONER MARTIN greeted us cordially as we entered his funeral home, which also housed the city's autopsy room. "No, there's been no post-mortem yet," he answered de Grandin's anxious question. "Fact is, Doctor Parnell, the coroner's physician, is out of town on six weeks' vacation, and as he has no official substitute, I——"

"Ah, *parbleu,* our problem then is solved!" the Frenchman broke in delightedly. "Appoint me in his place, *Monsieur,* and I shall perform the autopsy at once, immediately. Yes; of course."

The coroner regarded him thoughtfully. They were firm friends, the tall, gray-haired mortician and the dapper little Frenchman, and each held the other's professional attainments in high regard. "By George, I'll do it!" Mr. Martin agreed. "It's a bit irregular, for I suppose you're not strictly 'a physician and surgeon regularly resident in the county,' but I think my authority permits me to make such interim appointments as I choose. Have you any theory of the death?"

"Decidedly, *Monsieur.* This so unfortunate young woman was murdered."

"Murdered? Why, there's no trace of violence, or——"

"That is where you do mistake; observe, if you please." Crossing the brightly lighted, white-tiled room, de Grandin moved the sheet shrouding the still form upon the operating-table and pointed to the inner corner of the left eye. "You see?" he asked.

Bending forward, we descried the tiniest spot of black. It might have been a bead of mascara displaced from her elaborately made-up lashes; perhaps an accumulation of dust.

"Blood," de Grandin told us solemnly. "I noticed it when first I viewed the body, and I said to me, 'Jules de Grandin, why is it that this poor one bleeds from the eye? Has she fallen, sustained a fracture of the skull, with consequent concussion of the brain?'

" 'It are not likely,' I reply to me, 'for had she done so she would have bled also from the nose; perhaps the ear, as well.'

"Then I remember of a body which I once examined in France. A very cunning murder had been done that time, but physicians of the Ministry of Justice discovered him. Yes, of course. This is how it had been done:

"Above the eye there is a little cul-de-sac, a pouch, roofed off by the so thin bone of the supraorbital plate, upon which rests the brain. A long, thin instrument of steel, like, by example, the pins with which the pretty ladies used to fasten on their hats, could be thrust in there, curved above the eye, and easily pierce the thin bone of the supraorbital plate. *Voilà,* the instrument punctures the frontal lobe, a hemorrhage results, and a synthetic apoplexy takes place. Death follows. You see? *Mais, c'est très simple.*

"And, my friends"—he turned his level, unwinking cat-stare on each of us in turn—"the murderer in that other case was an Asiatic—a Hindoo. The technique in that case was like that in the case before us; I damn suspect the nationality of the murderers is similar, too. Come, let us see if Jules de Grandin is mistaken."

With the uncanny speed and certainty which characterized all his surgery he set to work with bistoury and saw and chisel, laid the scalp and lifted off the skull-vault. "Observe him, gentlemen," he ordered, pointing with his knife-blade to the dissected frontal lobe. "Here is the blood-clot which caused death, and here"—he directed our attention to the neatly sawed skull—"you will observe the small hole in the roof of the orbit, the hole by which the instrument of death penetrated the brain. Is it not all plain?"

I had to look a second time before I could discern the hole, but at length I saw it. There was no doubt of it, the roof of the supraorbital plate had been pierced, and death had followed the resultant brain-hemorrhage.

"Good heavens, this is fiendish!" exclaimed the coroner.

"Perfectly," agreed de Grandin placidly.

"And you suspect the murderer?"

"I am certain that he is one of four whom I did see tonight, but which one I can not surely say. Moreover, *hélas,* knowing and proving are two very different things. Our next task is to match our knowledge with our evidence, and——"

The buzzer of the operating-room telephone broke through his words, and with a murmured apology Mr. Martin crossed the room and took up the receiver.

"What, at the Hotel Winfield?" he demanded sharply. "Yes, I have it—O-r-l-o-f-f. Right. Send Jack and Tommy over with the ambulance."

"What is it, Monsieur Martin?" de Grandin asked, and as the coroner turned from the 'phone I felt my pulses beating faster.

"Oh," answered Mr. Martin wearily, "it's another case for us. Mr. Orloff, the manager of the Issatakko Ballet, has just been found dead in his room at the Hotel Winfield."

"Nom d'un nom d'un nom d'un nom! So soon?" cried Jules de Grandin. "I warned the silly, avaricious fool of his danger, but he valued gold above life and would not have police protection, and——

"Quick, *Monsieur,"* he besought Martin, "bid them hold the ambulance. Friend Trowbridge and I must accompany them; we must see that body—observe the way it lies and all surrounding circumstances—before it has been moved."

Stripping off rubber gloves and apron he thrust his arms into his dinner jacket, seized me by the elbow and fairly dragged me up the stairs to the garage where the ambulance was waiting, engine purring.

"You're sure one of those men we saw in the theater tonight killed that girl?" I asked as we dashed through the quiet midnight street, our howling siren sounding strident warning.

"But certainly," he answered. "We have the similarity of technique in the stabbing through the eye, we have the threatening note to Monsieur Orloff, we have the circumstance of attempted garroting of Mademoiselle Hélène, last of all—this." From an envelope he produced a strand of crisp, black hair. "I found it bedded under the fingernail of the dead girl when I examined her remains in the theater," he explained. "She put up some resistance, but her assailant was too powerful."

"But this is curly hair," I objected. "Those men all had perfectly straight hair, and——"

"On their heads, yes," he conceded. "But this is hair from a beard, my friend. What then? The fourth man, the one who left the theater before the others, wore a beard. That it was he who attempted to garrote Mademoiselle Hélène in the alley I am certain; that he also killed poor Mademoiselle Niki in her dressing-room I am convinced, but——"

"How can you prove it?"

"*Ha,* there is the pinch of the too-tight shoe!" he agreed ruefully. "*Tout la même,* if it can be proved, Jules de Grandin is the man to do it. He is one devilish clever fellow, that de Grandin."

SPRAWLED supinely across his bed, eyes staring sightlessly at the ceiling, mouth slightly agape, tongue protruding, lay the little, fat manager of the Issatakko Ballet. It needed no second glance to tell that he was dead, and it required only a second look to tell the manner of his dying; for round his throat, just above the line of his stiffly starched dress collar, was a livid, anemic depression no wider than a lead pencil, but so deep it almost pierced the skin. Habituated to viewing both the processes and results of violent death, de Grandin crossed the room with a rapid stride, took the dead man's head between his palms and slowly raised it. It was as though the head were joined to the body by a cord rather than a column of bone and muscle; for there was no resistance to the little Frenchman's slender hands as the dead chin nodded upward.

"*Parbleu,* again?" de Grandin muttered.

"What?" I asked.

"It is the strangler's mark, my friend," he answered, fingering the dead man's broken neck with delicately probing fingers. "Nothing but a *thag's* garrote leaves a mark like this and breaks the neck in this manner. One trained in the murder-school of Kalika has done this thing, and—ah? *A-a-ah? Que diable?*"

Bending forward suddenly he raised the manager's clenched hand. Protruding from between the first and scond finger was a wisp of black, curling hair.

"*Parbleu,* he sheds his hair as an old hen drops feathers at the moulting-season, that one," the Frenchman muttered grimly. "And, *sang du diable,* I shall drag him to his death by those selfsame hairs, or may I eat fried turnips for my Christmas dinner!"

"Whatever are you vaporing about?" I demanded.

"This, *mordieu!*" he answered sharply. "Even as the poor young Mademoiselle Niki, this unfortunate man grappled unavailingly with his assailant. In his case, as in hers, the murderer leant close to do his work, and in each instance his victim grasped him by the beard, yet could not hold him. But they managed to pluck away a hair and hold it in their hands as death came to them. The inference is

clear, unmistakable. The same man did both murderers."

"Well?"

"By damn it, no! It is not well at all, my friend. It is quite entirely otherwise. Attend me: This *sacré* killer, this strangler, this stabber-in-the eye, he is emboldened by success. He thinks because he has been able to do these things that he can continue on his road of wickedness. 'These crimes I make are unexplained,' he says to him. 'These Western fools are frightened, but they know not what it is they fear. *Voilà,* I continue in the future as in the past, killing when and where I please, and no one shall suspect me or call me to account.'

"Say you so, *Monsieur l'Assassin?* Be happy while you may; Jules de Grandin has his nose upon your trail!"

"BUT no, *Monsieur,* not by no means; there it is you make the grand mistake!" de Grandin assured Mr. Masakowski, the new manager of the Issatakko Ballet, next morning. "Your decision to abandon this enterprise will prove financially disastrous; it will stamp you as a weakling; it will also greatly inconvenience me."

Masakowski, a lean, hawk-nosed man with the earmarks of Southeastern Europe written large upon him, regarded the little Frenchman with a look in which fear and cupidity were almost evenly blended. "I'd like to carry on the show," he admitted. "The house is a sell-out and we're turning 'em away for the next three nights, but—well, you know what happened last night. Orloff's dead; murdered, I've heard it said, and Niki died mighty strangely in her dressing-room, too. Now Julia and Riccarda are reported absent. I called their house when they were half an hour late, and the landlady said they didn't even come home last night. Something darn funny about that." He broke off, drumming on the cigarette-burned edge of his desk with long, nervous fingers.

De Grandin tweaked the needle-ends of his tiny, blond mustache. "You tell me two young ladies of the chorus are missing?" he asked.

"Not from the chorus; they were principals," Masakowski returned. "You remember the last episode, 'The Death of a Yogi'? Where, after thunder and lightning and tempest fail to rouse the ascetic from his contemplation Siva appears and summons the snake-queen to put her spell on him? Julia and Riccarda take the part of Siva. It's no cinch for two people to be as perfectly synchronized in movement as those girls are—the illusion they give of a single body with four arms is perfect, and took a lot of rehearsing. With them out of the show we'll have a tough time getting on, and we can't cut out that number—it's the hit of the piece."

"And have you no understudies for them?"

Masakowski ran a thin, artistically long hand through thick, artistically long hair. "That's just the trouble," he almost wailed. "Toni's understudied Julia, and we've another girl who can fill in with the second pair of arms—but they won't act. They say there's a jinx on the part and absolutely refuse to go on. And I can't rehearse another pair of girls in time for the evening show, so——"

"Mademoiselle Toni?" de Grandin interrupted. "She is here, perhaps?"

"Yes, she's here, all right, but——"

"*Très bon.* Me, I shall see her, talk with her, persuade her. I have the influence with that young lady."

"Yeah?" The manager was unimpressed. "Get her to take that part tonight and I'll give you and your friend season passes to any seats in the house."

"Agreed, by blue!" the little Frenchman answered with a smile, and led the

way backstage where electricians, performers and stage hands discussed the tragedy of the preceding night in the quaint jargon of their kind.

"*HOLA, Mademoiselle; comment allez-vous?*" de Grandin hailed Miss Fisk with a smile.

"Oh, good morning," the girl returned. "Awful about Monsoor Orloff, ain't it?"

"Deplorable," agreed the Frenchman, "but if the so superb performance should cease on that account, the calamity would be complete. It rests entirely on your charming shoulders, *Mademoiselle.*"

"Huh?" She eyed him with quick suspicion; then, satisfied that he was serious: "How d'ye mean?"

He motioned her away from her companions before replying, then whispered, "*Monsieur* the Manager tells me you will not consent to do the dance of Siva——"

"I'll tell the cock-eyed world I won't!" she broke in vehemently. "Some one's hung the Indian sign on that job, and I ain't askin' for nothin' bul-lieve you me. First Félicie and Daphné take a powder on us; then this morning, right after Monsoor Orloff dies, Riccarda and Julia turn up missing. Now they want me to take it on. Not much!"

"*Mille pardons, Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin answered in bewilderment, "what is it that you say concerning Mesdemoiselles Daphné and Félicie? They took a remedy? No, I do not comprehend."

A little, gurgling laugh forced itself between the girl's pretty, brightly painted lips. Then, with sudden seriousness, she explained: "A month ago, when the show was having its tryout up in Bridgeport, Old Orloff got some sort o' note that scared him speechless. None of us knew just what it was, but he was like a feller with the finger on him—tore his hair—or went through the motions, rather, seeing he was bald as a skinned onion, and swore some enemy was out to wreck the show.

"Well, anyhow, he was more scared than a cat at a dog show for the next four days; then, when nothin' happened, he kind o' cooled down. But you should 'a' seen him when Daphné and Félicie quit us without notice. You'd 'a' thought——"

"Quit? How?" he cut in.

"How? Just quit, that's all. They left the theater Sat'day night and never showed up again. None o' us have heard a word from either of 'em. Unless"—she halted, and a shiver, as though from sudden chill, ran through her scantily clad, exquisite form—"unless that statue——" Again that odd, half-frightened halt in speech, again a shudder of repulsion.

"The statue, *Mademoiselle?*" de Grandin prompted as she made no move to finish.

"Sure, that's another dam' funny thing about this business, Doctor. We'd just struck this burg—city, I mean—when an express van backs up to the theater with that statue all crated up, and addressed to Monsoor Orloff. There was an anomonous note with it, too."

"An anomonous——" de Grandin began questioningly, then: "Ah, *mais oui,* one apprehends. And this 'anomonous' message, *Mademoiselle;* it said what, if you remember?"

"It sounded kind o' nutty to me; sumpin about some sculptor havin' seen the show in Bridgeport and fallen ravishin'ly in love with the Dance o' Siva, or some such nonsense, and how he'd set up day and night chiselin' out a representation o' the divine pantomime, or sumpin, and wouldn't Monsoor Orloff please accept this token of an anomonous admirer and well-wisher, or sumpin like that.

"Old Orloff—Monsoor Orloff, I mean—was pleased as Punch with it and had it

set up in the lobby. It's out there now, I guess, but I don't know. The thing always gave me the creeps—it looks so much like Daphné, and every time I went past it, it seemed like she was somewhere tryin' to tell me sumpin, and couldn't; so I just quit lookin' at it.

"Now Julia and Riccarda have vanished into thin air, as the feller says, just like Daphné and Félicie, and I should take Daphné's place? I—guess—not! My mother didn't raise any half-wit children."

De Grandin gave his small mustache a soft, affectionate pat, then twisted its twin needle-points with such sudden savagery that I feared he'd tear them loose from his face. *"Mademoiselle,"* he asked abruptly, "you are Irish, are you not?"

"Yes, of course; but what's that got to do with it?"

"Much; everything, perhaps. Your people see much farther through the mysteries of life—and death—than most. Will you await us here? We would examine this statue which affects you so unpleasantly."

THE statue of Siva stood upon a three-foot onyx pedestal in the theater's main lobby, and represented a slender, graceful four-armed female figure seated cross-legged, feet drawn up so far that they rested instep-down upon the bent thighs, soles upward. A pair of arms which grew naturally from the shoulders were bent at obtuse angles, thumbs and fingers daintily joined, as though holding a pinch of powder. Immediately below these arms there sprang from the axillæ a second pair of limbs, which extended outward to right and left, the right hand clasping what appeared to be a wand tipped by an acorn, the left hand cupped, a twisting flame of fire rising from its hollowed palm. Upon its head was set a seven-spindled crown. The head was slightly bent, eyes closed, a look of brooding calm upon the small, regular features. The whole thing was executed in some smooth, black, gleaming substance—whether lacquered bronze, ebony or stained and varnished plaster I could not say—and the workmanship was exquisitely fine, even the tiny lines in the palms of the hands and soles of the feet and the scarcely perceptible serrations in the lips being represented with a faithfulness exactly reproducing nature. Save for a gem-studded collar, armlets, bracelets and anklets, the form was nude, but the gently swelling breasts were so slim and youth-like as almost to suggest a being of a neuter gender, a form endowed with grace, charm and beauty, yet sexless as an angel of the Apocalypse.

De Grandin walked slowly round the sculptured figure, examining it critically. "By blue," he murmured, "he was no jerry-workman, the one who made this thing. But no, his technique, it is—*cordieu,* my friend, I think it too perfect!"

Vaguely, I understood his criticism. No connoisseur of art, I was yet aware of some subtle difference between the life-sized effigy before us and other works of sculpture. Other statues I had seen suggested life, action or emotion, expressing their themes through representation rather than through reproduction. This thing was no simulacrum of humanity, it was humanity's own self, complete to the tiniest, faintest anatomical detail, and differed from other statuary as a bald and literal photograph differs from a portrait done in oils. Something not to be defined, something which impressed no physical sense, yet which impressed me sharply, repulsed me as I looked upon the statue.

"Morbleu!" the little Frenchman's sharp ejaculation brought me back from the thoughtful mood into which I'd

lapsed. "*Les mouches,* my friend, do you see them?"

"Eh?" I asked. "*Mouches*—flies? Where?"

"There, *cordieu!*" he answered in a low, hard whisper. "See, regard, observe them, if you will." His slender, well-manicured forefinger pointed dramatically to several tiny inert forms lying on the polished plinth on which the statue sat. They were a half-dozen common house-flies, still and dead, some turned back-down, some lying on their sides.

"Well?" I asked wonderingly.

"Well be baked and roasted on the grates of hell!" he answered shortly. "Your nose, my friend, can you use it? What is it that you smell?" Seizing me by the neck he thrust my face forward so violently that I thought he'd bruise my nose against the statue's polished, ebon surface. "Smell, smell—smell it, *mordieu!*" he commanded angrily.

Obediently I contracted my nostrils in a sniff, then wrenched loose from his grip. "Why, it smells like—like formalin," I muttered.

" 'Smells like formalin'?" he mimicked. "*Grand Dieu des porcs,* it *is* formalin, great stupid-head! What does it here?"

"Why——" I began, but:

"*Parbleu,* yes; you have said it—why?" he interrupted. "Why and double why, my friend. That is the problem we are set to solve."

Drawing a letter from his jacket he emptied the envelope, swept the defunct insects into it and placed it tenderly in his waistcoat pocket. "Now for Mademoiselle Hélène," he announced, leading the way backstage once more.

"*Mademoiselle,*" he whispered when the girl, obedient to his beckoning finger, joined us in a secluded corner, "you must go on tonight. You and Mademoiselle Dorothée must impersonate the Great God Siva at tonight's performance. I——"

"Says you," the girl broke in. "Listen, I'm not takin' any chances with that part. Last night some darn fool was whistlin' in his dressing-room, and you know how unlucky for the show that is—*I* know it; didn't I like to get choked to death as I was leavin' the theater? This morning, on my way here, I ran head-on into a cross-eyed man, and a black cat an' two kittens crossed my path just as I turned into the alley to the stage door. Think I'm goin' to take on that hoodoo part with all them signs against me? Not much! Four girls who did that Siva dance before have disappeared. How do I know what's happened to 'em? Who knows——"

"I do!" de Grandin's interruption was sharp as cutting steel. "I can say what their fate was—they were murdered!"

"My Gawd!" Amazement, incredulity, but, strangely, little fear, showed in the girl's startled face.

"Perfectly, *Mademoiselle.* Mademoiselle Niki and Monsieur Orloff, they were murdered too, if not by the same hand, undoubtlessly by the same gang.

"Attend me——" His voice was low, scarcely above a whisper, but freighted with such authority that the girl forbore to interrupt, though we saw curiosity pressing at her lips like water at a straining dam when the freshets swell the streams in springtime. "I have every reason to believe these deaths and disappearances were due to a campaign of murder and intimidation subtly planned and craftily carried out by a quartet of the shrewdest criminals which the world has ever seen," he continued. "I tell you this because I think you can be trusted.

"Furthermore, *Mademoiselle,* because I think you have the courage of your splendid Irish race I ask that you will do this dance tonight; perhaps tomorrow

night, and several nights thereafter. The miscreants who murdered Mesdemoiselles Niki, Félicie and Daphné, who killed Monsieur Orloff and also doubtless did away with Julia and Riccarda, will unquestionably attempt your life if you perform this dance. For your protection you have only Jules de Grandin and *le bon Dieu;* yet it is only by luring them to attack you that we may hope to apprehend them and make them pay the penalty for their misdeeds. I do not minimize the danger, though Heaven, especially when it has Jules de Grandin as ally, is mighty to protect the innocent. Will you accept the risk? Will you help us in our aim to fulfil justice?"

For a long moment Helen Fisk looked at him as though he were a total stranger. Then, gradually, a look of hard determination came into her face, a stiffening in her softly molded chin, a hardening in her eyes of Irish blue. "I'll do it," she agreed. "Gawd knows my teeth'll be chatterin' so's I can't say my Hail Marys, but I'll take it on. If it's the only way to get the scum that did in Félicie and Daphné, I'm game to try, but I'll be so scared——"

"Not you; I know your kind; you will laugh at danger——" de Grandin told her but:

"Yeh, I'll laugh at it, all right—from the teeth out!" Miss Fisk cut in.

"N'importe; that you do laugh at all is all that matters," he assured her. *"Mademoiselle, je vous salue!"* He bent his sleek, blond head, and a quick flush mounted Helen Fisk's cheeks as for the first time in her life she felt a man's lips on her fingers.

He was busy in the laboratory most of the afternoon, and when he finally emerged he wore a faintly puzzled look upon his face. "It was formalin, beyond a doubt," he announced, "but why? It are most puzzling."

"What is?" I asked.

"The manner of those flies' demise. I have examined their so small corpses, and all are filled with formaldehyde. Something lured them to that *sacré* effigy of Siva, and there they met their death—died before one could pronounce the so droll name of that Monsieur Jacques Robinson—and died by formalin poisoning. The statue, too, as you can testify, gave off the perfume of formaldehyde, but why should it be so?"

"Hanged if I know," I answered. "It's really a most remarkable piece of work, that statue. Some one with an uncanny gift for sculpture must have seen that dance and have been so inspired by it that he made the thing and gave it to poor Orloff, but——"

"Quite yes, that is the story we have heard," he acquiesced, "but has it not the smell of fish upon it? Artists, I know, are not wont to hide their light beneath a bushel-basket. But no. Rather, they will seek for recognition till it wearies you. Why, then, should a man with talent such as this one had seek anonymity? Such modesty rings counterfeit, my friend."

"Well," I temporized, "vanity takes strange forms, you know, sometimes——"

"Vanity, ha! *Tu parles, mon ami!"* With a sudden dramatic gesture he struck both hands against his temples. "Oh, Jules de Grandin, thou great stupid-head, how near they came to giving you the little fish of April, even as they did to poor, dead Orloff! But no, you are astute, shrewd, clever, *mon brave,* they shall not make the monkey out of you!

"Au 'voir, my friend," he flung across his shoulder as he hurried from the room, "I have important duties to perform. Be sure you're at the theater on time. A

spectacle not upon the program will be shown tonight, unless I greatly miss my guess!"

TRYING to look as unself-conscious as possible—and succeeding very poorly—Detective Sergeant Jeremiah Costello, star sleuth of the Harrisonville police force and bosom friend of Jules de Grandin, strolled back and forth across the theater lobby, his obviously seldom-used dinner clothes occasioning him more than a little embarrassment. Here and there amid the fashionable audience hurrying toward the ticket-taker's gate I descried other plain-clothes men, all equally uncomfortable in formal clothes, but all alert, keen-eyed, watchful of every face among the crowd. The effigy of Siva, I noted, had been taken from the lobby.

Backstage, uniformed men mounted guard at every vantage-point. It would have been impossible for any one not known to have gone ten feet toward dressing-rooms or wings without being challenged. Outside in the alley by the stage door a patrolman supplemented the guardianship of the regular watchman, and a limousine was parked across the alleyway, a uniformed policeman in the tonneau, another perched alertly in the cab beside the chauffeur.

The show began as usual, spectacle followed spectacle, each in turn being hailed with tumultuous applause. When "The Death of a Yogi" was presented we watched breathless as Helen Fisk and her partner did the sitting dance of Siva and the daughter of Kadru lured the young ascetic's soul from out his body with her venomed Judas-kiss.

"Well, so far everything's all right," I congratulated as the purple curtains drew together before the stage, but de Grandin cut my optimistic statement short.

"Will you observe them, my friend?" he whispered jubilantly, driving his sharp elbow into my ribs. "*Parbleu,* do they not look as sad as the stones in the road?"

Up the center aisle, with anger, something like chagrin upon their swarthy faces, came the same trio we had noted on the previous occasion. With them, whispering excitedly to the slender, light-hued man, was a short, thick-set, bearded ruffian, impeccable in evening dress, but plainly out of place in Occidental clothes. He was black as any negro out of Africa, but his straight, black hair and curling beard, parted in the center, and the wild, fanatic rolling of his bloodshot eyes labeled him an Asiatic, and one habituated to the use of opium or hashish, I guessed.

"A little while ago he rose and left the others," de Grandin whispered with a chuckle. "When he went out he looked for all the world like Madame Puss intent on dining on canary-bird; when he returned, *parbleu,* he made me think of a small dog who creeps back to his master with his tail between his legs. The *gendarmes* we had set on watch had spoiled his fun completely!"

CONVOYED by policemen, the members of the Issatakko troupe left the theater, their guardians staying with them till their doors were safely locked. "Now, I'm afther thinkin' we can go to bed, sors?" Costello asked as he reported all the actors had been safely taken home.

"There is a guard at Mademoiselle Hélène's house?" de Grandin asked.

"There is that, sor," the sergeant answered. "I've got a felly on patrol in th' street, an' another in th' alley at th' back. I'm thinkin' it'll be a dam' smart man as gits into that young lady's house tonight widout a invitation."

The little Frenchman nodded thoughtfully; then: "Suppose we go and see that all is well before we take a good-night drink," he suggested. "It was I who urged her to perform that dance tonight;

I would not have my conscience tell me I had failed to give protection to her in case she suffered injury."

The street in which Helen Fisk lodged was flanked by double rows of narrow, tall brick houses, flat-fronted, monotonous, uniform as a company of grenadiers. As I drew my car to a halt beneath the lamp post which stood before the lodging-house, a uniformed policeman suddenly materialized from the darkness, glanced inquiringly at de Grandin and me, then saluted smartly as he recognized Costello.

"Everything O. K., O'Donnell?" the sergeant asked.

"Yes, sir; quiet as a graveyard at midnight, so far," the officer replied. "I ain't even seen a——"

A sudden burst of light, dazzling as a Very flare, followed by the sharp, staccato *rat-tat-tat* of machine-gun fire cut short his words.

"Glory be to God!" Costello cried. "What th' hell——"

Dragging at the pistol in his shoulder-holster, he hastened down the street toward the intersecting roadway whence the disturbance came, followed full-tilt by Officer O'Donnell. A moment later another form emerged from the shadow of the house and the street lamp glittered momentarily on brass buttons and silver shield as the patrolman who had mounted guard at the rear hurried past to join Costello and O'Donnell in the chase.

"Par la barbe d'un poisson vert," began de Grandin; then:

"Up, my friend; up quickly; I fear it is a ruse to draw away the guards; we must act quickly!" Fairly dragging me by a reluctant elbow, he rushed up the short flight of brownstone steps leading to the rooming-house door, pressed upon the panels with an impatient hand and stepped quickly into the dimly lighted hall.

"You see?" he asked in a fierce whisper. "The door is unlocked—open! How comes it?" For a brief instant he bent to examine the fastenings; then:

"Observe him, my friend," he commanded. Looking where he pointed I descried a thin wedge of wood, like a match-stick sharpened to a point, thrust into the Yale lock, making it impossible for the latch to fly into position when the catch had been released. *"Diablerie!"* he muttered. "Costello and the others, they have gone in chase of the wild goose. Come, we must find Mademoiselle Hélène right away, at once."

"I heard her say she lived on the third floor," I whispered, "but whether front or back I don't——"

"No matter," he cut in. "We shall find her—*prie Dieu* we find her first! Up, my friend; mount the front stairs, while I go up the back. We shall meet at the top floor, and should you see another coming down, detain him at all costs. We can not take the chances, now."

He scuttled down the hall and let himself through the swing-door which communicated with the kitchen, waving encouragement and haste to me as he disappeared.

Walking as softly as I could, I crept up the stairs leading to the second floor, began ascending the narrow, spiral flight which gave access to the top story, at last, rather out of breath, paused at the entrance to the long and narrow hallway which bisected the third floor of the house.

Although there were two fixtures set into the wall, only a single electric bulb was burning, and by its rather feeble glow I discerned narrow, white-enameled doors opening to right and left upon the corridor, like staterooms on the passage in a steamship cabin. The place was ut-

terly untenanted, not even a mouse disputing my possession. A moment I paused, waiting for de Grandin; then, as no sign of him appeared, I took a tentative step or two toward the rear of the house, ears attuned for his step upon the stairs.

A FAINT, light *click*, like the slipping of a well-oiled lock, sounded at my back, and as I turned something whistled past my face, a sharp *pop!* sounded, and the electric bulb burst with a little spurt of fire. Next moment the hallway was drowned in devastating, smothering darkness.

Half terrified, I paused a moment in my tracks; then, fumbling for my matchcase, I struck a light and held the little torch above my head.

"Oh!" I exclaimed involuntarily, shrinking back a step. Creeping stealthily on hands and knees, like an obscene and monstrously overgrown spider, was a man, a small, scrawny, dark-visaged man, silent as a snake in his sinister progress. As the matchlight shone momentarily on him it glinted eerily on the blade of a short, curved dagger clenched between his teeth. Brief as my inspection was, I recognized him as one of the quartet of Hindoos we had seen in the theater.

For a moment I stood frozen, aghast; then, marshaling my courage, I challenged sharply: "Halt—stand where you are, or I'll shoot!" Reaching in my waistcoat pocket, I clicked the cover of my glasses-case, hoping desperately that it simulated the sound of a revolver being cocked.

A low, soft laugh, sinister as the hissing of a serpent, answered me, and the fellow rose to his feet, raising his hands level with his ears and grinning at me maliciously. "Will the *sahib* shoot me, then?" he asked, letting the knife fall from between his teeth. "Is there no mercy in your heart for me, *hazur?*" The words were humble, abject, but the tone was gravid with biting irony.

"Turn around," I ordered gruffly. "Now, march, and no tricks, or—*ugh!*"

So near my ears I heard its whistling descent, so close to my face I felt its rough, hairy strands brush my nose-tip, something whirled snake-like through the darkness, looped about my neck and jerked sharply back, squeezing the life-breath from my throat, forcing my tongue and eyes forward with the sudden ferocity of its strangling grip. The throttling knot drew tight and tighter round my trachea; bone-hard, merciless knuckles kneaded swiftly, savagely at my spine where it joined the skull, seeking to break my neck. I tried to cry for help, but nothing but a stifled gurgle sounded from my swelling lips. Burned out, the match fell from my numbing fingers, and darkness blotted out the sneering face in front of me. Tiny sparks danced and flashed before my eyes; a roaring like the downpour of a dozen Niagaras pounded in my ears. "This is how poor Orloff died!" I thought, fighting vainly to escape the strangling coil about my neck.

A sudden shaft of sharp, white light stabbed through the darkness, illuminating the Hindoo's face before me for a fleeting moment. In the flash I saw the grinning mouth square open like an old Greek horror-mask, saw the swift shadow of a slim, white hand—and something else!—pass like a darting ray of light across the dusky throat an inch or so below the chin, saw the welling spate of blood which gushed across the writhing tongue and gleaming teeth. Then came a horrid, choking gurgle, as of something drowning, and the light blinked out. But:

"Spawn of the sewer—species of a stinking camel—take that to hell, and say I gave it to you!" de Grandin's whisper sounded in my ear, and the strang-

ling-cord loosed its biting grip as the man behind me gave a grunt of surprized pain and fell forward, almost oversetting me.

I turned about, clutching at the wall for support, and beheld my late assailant rolling on the floor, mouthing and slabbering horribly as he hugged both hands to his abdomen. *"Ai-i-i-i!"* his scream of mortal agony no thicker than the squeaking of a frightened mouse, and even that died in an anguished wheeze. From crotch to sternum he was slit as cleanly as a butcher slits a slaughtered hog for gutting.

I leaned against the wall, weak with retching nausea at the spectacle de Grandin's pocket torch disclosed.

"It is a good cut, that," the little Frenchman announced softly as he tiptoed across the hall, fumbled a moment and switched on the electric light. "Me, I rather favor it for autopsy work, although the general preference is for the vertical incision beginning at the——"

"Oh—*don't!*" I pleaded, near to swooning at the sight the lighted hall-lamp brought to view. Face downward on the floor lay the fellow I had apprehended, the ever-widening pool of blood which soaked into the carpet telling of his severed throat. Only the tremulous, spasmodic twitching of his clawing fingers told me that he still retained some little spark of life. Hunched on one shoulder, the cord with which he sought to strangle me still gripped in his hand, lay the other Hindoo, blood gushing from the foot-long incision which ran vertically up his abdomen. Jules de Grandin stood at ease, regarding his handiwork with every evidence of scientific satisfaction, a long, curved-bladed kurkri knife, whetted to a razor-edge, dangling by a thong from his right hand.

"Eh bien, mon vieux, you look as *triste* as hell upon a rainy Sunday afternoon!" he told me. "Is it that you have never seen the cover stripped from off the human entrails—you, a medical practitioner, a surgeon, an anatomist? *Ah bah,* for shame, my friend; you stand there quaking like a student making his first trip to the dissecting-room!"

"But," I gasped, still faint with stomach-sickness, "this is too——"

"Wrong again, my old one," he corrected with a grin. "Not two, but three. When I left you down below I crept all softly up the stairs until I reached the turn between this story and the one beneath. *Ah ha,* and what did I see there? What but a *sacré* son of Mother India going on all fours like a sly-boots up the stairs ahead of me! Oh, very silently he went; so silently he made no sound at all. He had to be seen to be believed, that one!

"What to do? I had my pistol, and I had my very useful knife, as well. Should I shoot I could not miss him, but what if there were others? The noise would surely put them on their guard, and I desired to surprize them. Accordingly, I chose the knife. I crept a little faster and reached my silent friend before he guessed that I was there at all. Then, very gently, I inserted my knife-tip between his second and third cervical vertebræ. *Voilà.* He died with exemplary expedition and with no unnecessary noise. Very good, I tell me. So far, so perfect.

"Then, still silently, I continued on my upward way. I came into the hall, and what did I behold? I ask to know. You, *cordieu,* standing at the stairhead, as innocent as any unborn lamb, while, crouched behind an angle of the wall, immediately in front of me, a thief-faced rascal was watching you. But ah—even as I saw this, I saw another thing. A door opened very softly in the hall behind you, a bearded ruffian—the same one we had seen in the theater—peered forth,

raised up a little stick of wood and flung it quickly at the light. He broke the bulb, and you were left in darkness!

"I heard you stumble in the dark, I saw you light a match, and by its light I saw you parley with the miscreant with the knife. *Tiens,* I also saw the other one advance upon you from the rear, drop his strangling-cord about your throat and begin the pleasant process of choking you to death. 'This thing has ceased to be a joke,' I tell me; 'it are time that Jules de Grandin put a stop to it'."

"You saved my life; no doubt of it," I told him. "I'm very grateful——"

"*Chut,* it was a pleasure," he cut in, looking complacently at the stiffening bodies on the floor before us.

"Come," he commanded. "We must find Mademoiselle Hélène. She was not in the room from which the bearded man attacked you, for that door had not been forced, and I particularly warned her to bar her door tonight. These other doors have not been opened, for the two who came before me up the stairs had no chance to get in mischief ere I found them. Therefore, it follows that—*ah, que diable?*"

He broke off, pointing to the lower margin of the door beside which we stood. Where the door and sill came together a tiny hole, scarcely large enough to let a man insert his finger, had been gouged, and a little pile of fresh sawdust lay about the hole.

"Well——" I began, but:

"Not at all; by no means, it is very dam' unwell, I suspect!" he interrupted. "One does not surely know, of course, but——"

He rose and beat upon the panels. "*Mademoiselle,* Mademoiselle Hélène?" he called softly. "Are you there? Answer, if you are, but on no account get off the bed."

"Who is it?" Helen Fisk's voice responded. "Doctor de Grandin? Is anything wrong?"

"We hope not, but we fear the worst," he answered. "Stay where you are, for your life, *Mademoiselle,* and do not be alarmed when we break in the door——"

"I'll let you in," the girl replied, and we heard a rustling of the bed-linen. And:

"No! *Pour l'amour de Dieu,* do not set foot to floor, I beg!" he shouted. "We come!"

Retreating to the far side of the hall he charged full-tilt against the bedroom door, driving his shoulder against the white-enameled panels, bursting the flimsy lock and half running, half stumbling into the pitch-dark room.

"Stand back, Friend Trowbridge—remain upon your bed, *Mademoiselle!*" he warned, pausing at the threshold and darting his flashlight quickly about the apartment. "Death lies in wait upon the floor, and—*ah?* So!"

Like a pouncing cat he leaped across the cheap rag rug with which the room was carpeted, his searchlight playing steadily upon a tiny, cord-like black coil beneath a chintz-upholstered chair. With a slanting, chopping motion he brought his big, curved knife-blade down once, twice, and yet again, dividing the tiny snake into half a dozen fragments with the slicing blows. "*Ha,* little brother to the Devil, you are quick, but I am quicker; you are venomous, but so am I, *pardieu!*" he cried. "Go back to hell, from whence you came, and tell those other snakes I sent you there to keep them company—they, too, have felt this knife tonight!"

"What is it?" cried Miss Fisk and I in chorus.

He danced across the room, turned on the light; then, with the air of a gallant assisting a fine lady from her coach, put

out his hand and helped the girl down from the bed.

"Do not approach too near, my beautiful," he warned. "Those tiny, tender feet of yours might take a wound from him, dead though he be."

"What *is* it?" Straight and slim as a boy in her close-cropped hair and Shantung silk pajamas, Helen Fisk looked with more curiosity than fear at the dismembered little serpent underneath the chair.

"A karait, *parbleu,*" he answered. "*Bungarus coerulens,* the zoölogists call him, and he is not a customer to trifle with, by any means. Nor, *cordieu,* had you stepped from off your bed and had he sunk those little, so small fangs into your foot or ankle, '*Dirige, Domine in conspectu tuo viam meum*' the good priests would have sung for you, *ma chère,* for death follows his bite in from six to eight minutes. Little cousin to the cobra that he is, his bite is far more deadly than that of his disreputable big kinsman."

"Gawd, you took a chance with it!" the girl exclaimed admiringly.

"Not very much," he admitted, stroking his mustache complacently. "He can strike only his own length, and my knife was a good two inches longer than his body."

"But how'd he come to get in my room?" she asked, bewildered. "D'ye s'pose there's any more of 'em here?"

"No to your second question, *Mademoiselle*—through a hole bored in your door to your first," he answered, smiling. "Those sons of sin cut a little, so small opening in the door, sent their silent messenger of death into your room, and were about to decamp when—we detained them, Friend Trowbridge and I." To me he added:

"That accounts for that fellow's knife, *mon ami;* it was with that he bored the hole in Mademoiselle Hélène's door, and he was doubtless about to take departure when your step upon the stair arrested him and he remained to assist his partner of the strangling-cord in finishing you, if help were needed."

"What's that?" the girl demanded. "You mean the guy who almost killed me at the theater was *here,* and attacked Doctor Trowbridge?"

"*Was* here is correct, *Mademoiselle.*"

"Where's he at now?"

"*Eh bien,* who can say? I do not think the life he led was very good; his chances of salvation, I should say, were of the slimmest."

"You—you mean you *kilt* him?"

"Perfectly, *Mademoiselle.* Both him and his two assistants."

"Gee, but you're *wonderful!*" Before we realized what she was about, Helen Fisk had laid a hand upon each of his cheeks, drawn his face close to hers and kissed him on the mouth."

"*Pardieu,* my lovely one," de Grandin chuckled, "you do greatly tempt me to make murder my vocation. For a reward such as that——"

THE thumping thunder of heavy boots upon the stairs cut short his speech.

"Doctor de Grandin; Doctor de Grandin, are ye there, sor?" demanded Sergeant Jeremiah Costello as, one of the policemen in his wake, he dashed headlong up the stairs.

"Yes, *morbleu,* here am I," de Grandin answered tartly, "and never was I less entranced at sight of your so ugly *tête de roux,* thou breaker-up of romance! What is it now?"

"Some one's been givin' us th' run-around," the sergeant panted. "Some son-of-a-gun—howly Mither, are they dead, sor?" he broke off as he saw the corpses on the floor.

"Like a herring," de Grandin returned

nonchalantly. "You were saying——?"

"Well, sor, it looks like some one stood us up. When we seen that there now flash o' light an' heard th' shots a-poppin', we made sure it wuz a gang war broke out agin; so down to th' corner we hotfooted it, like three dam' fools, an' what d'ye think we found?"

The little Frenchman grinned, a thought maliciously. "*Pétards*—how do you call him?—firecrackers?" he replied.

"Good Lord, how'd ye guess it, sor?"

"*Ah bah,* the trick is ancient, *mon vieux;* so old and threadbare that even you should be immune to it. However, it worked, and if I and Doctor Trowbridge had not been on hand to circumvent their wickedness our poor young lady here would now have been a lovely corpse, and, what is more, I should have missed an evening's pleasure. As it is——"

"What's goin' on here, I'd like to know?" an irate landlady, mountainous in righteous wrath and a canton flannel nightrobe, mounted the third-floor stairs. "What's th' meanin' o' this breakin' in a decent woman's house at midnight, an'——"

"Arrah, woman, hold your whist!" Costello interrupted. "'Tis meself an' Doctor de Grandin an' Doctor Trowbridge yonder as kilt them three murtherin' haythins that come into yer place to stab ye all whilst ye wuz sleepin'—an' ye've got th' brassbound nerve to ask us what we're doin' here!"

"Ye mean ye *kilt* somebody in my house—in *my* house, givin' th' place a bad name an' ruinin' me business?" the landlady demanded shrilly. "I'll have th' law on ye fer this, so help me——"

"Ye'll be feelin' me take me hand off'n th' side o' yer face if ye don't shut up an' quit interferin' wid a officer o' th' law in th' performance o' his dooty!" Costello told her sharply. "Go on, now; go lay down somewheres an' give yer tongue a rest till we've finished wid this business. We need no wimmin to tell us how to do our wor-rk, so we don't."

The majesty of the law being vindicated and the landlady effectually squelched, the sergeant turned once more to de Grandin. "We seen a felly runnin' down th' street when we got to th' corner, sor," he reported, "an' whilst we didn't have nothin' agin him, exactly, I thought it best to run 'im in on general principles. Fellies runnin' loose at midnight when some one's made a monkey out o' th' police force will bear investigatin', I'm afther thinkin', sor."

"*Exactement,*" the Frenchman nodded in agreement. "What sort of person is your prisoner?"

"Why, I should say he's kin to them —to these pore fellies that ye kilt," Costello answered. "Dark like them, he is, an' kind o' slim, an' snooty as a sparry full o' worms; talkin' about his rights, an' how he'll have me broke, an' bein' sarcastical as th' very divil an' all."

"*Comment?* I know his kind. What answer did you give to his abuse?" The anticipatory gleam kindling in the little Frenchman's small, blue eyes burst into sudden flame of merriment as Costello answered simply:

"Bedad, I sloughed 'im in th' jaw, sor!"

NEITHER of us was much surprized to recognize Costello's prisoner as the slender, patrician Hindoo we had seen in the theater in company with the men de Grandin had disposed of. With a badly swelling eye, dress clothes sadly disarranged and a pair of handcuffs on his wrists, the fellow was put to it to maintain his air of lofty hauteur, but sustain it he did, glancing now and again at Costello with venomous hatred min-

gled with fear, at de Grandin and me with unaffected scorn.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked in faultless, Oxonian English. "I refuse to answer questions or to go with you until I see my lawyer."

"Easy on, laddie buck," Costello cautioned. "Ye'll go where we bid ye, an' no questions asked, or I'll know th' reason why. As for answerin' what we ask, I'm afther thinkin' ye'll talk a-plenty, an' be glad to. Come on!"

THE light burned brightly in Coroner Martin's operating-room, casting back dazzling reflections from the white-tiled walls, the terrazzo floor and the gleaming porcelain of the embalming-tables. Shrouded with a sheet, a bulky object occupied the center of the room, and toward it de Grandin walked like a demonstrator of anatomy about to address his class.

"*Messieurs,*" he began, "I have here Exhibit A, as they say in the courtroom —the statue of the Great God Siva, taken from the lobby of the Issatakko theater this afternoon.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux,* you will recall the deceased flies we found upon that statue's pedestal? *Bon.* Me, I have analyzed their corpses and found them dead from formaldehyde poisoning. Very good.

"Doctor Trowbridge," again he turned to me, for all the world like counsel examining a witness, "can you recall an odor which we descried about that statue when we looked at it?"

"Why, yes," I answered. "It was formalin. I thought it odd, but——"

"We have no great concern with buts," he cut in quickly. "Behold——"

With a sweep of his hand he tore the sheet from the statue and pointed dramatically to the glistening, dark-hued composition of which the thing was made. "A month or so ago two young women of the Issatakko Ballet Russe disappeared," he told us. "They impersonated the god Siva in the spectacle of the Yogi's Death. No one has seen them since; no one knows where they are gone, or where they are at present.

"*Ha,* is it so? No, *tête-bleu,* it is not! They are here, my friends — behold them!"

Snatching up a heavy wooden maul he dealt the statue a sudden vicious blow, repeated it; rained stroke on stroke upon it.

"Look out, you'll break it, man!" I cried, shocked by his act of vandalism.

"*Bon Dieu,* but I intend to!" he panted, striking savagely again at the image's arm. A black, shining flake, four inches long by two in width, detached itself from the bent arm of Siva, fell to the hard-tiled floor with a tinkling, metallic sound, and in the opening thus made there showed, dull, livid, but glistening strangely in the strong light of the operating-room, an arm of *human flesh!*

The gruesome work went on. Flake after flake of shining, black veneer was chipped away and slowly, horribly, there came to view the naked body of a woman.

"Behold, my friends," de Grandin ordered, his voice a sibilant, knife-sharp whisper, "behold the core—*the heart of Siva!*"

As disclosure followed on disclosure I felt a tightening in my throat, an odd, cold, prickling sensation in my scalp and at the back of my neck. A four-inch-long incision had been made in the girl's thigh, thus opening the great femoral artery. The hemorrhage must have been terrific, death following almost instantly. Thereafter the body was seated with folded legs in the attitude assumed by Siva in the ballet, fine steel wires were wound

about the limbs to hold them in position where necessary, and the body pumped full of dilute formaldehyde, thus preserving it and imparting a lasting rigidity. A second pair of arms, severed from their owner's body close to the trunk, had been similarly embalmed and sewn into the armpits of the seated girl, thus supplying the four pectoral limbs required for the sitting dance, and, the monstrous effigy finally molded out of human flesh, the whole was coated with a shell of quick-hardening varnish composed of silicate and gypsum, colored black with bitumen.

"Had not the varnish cracked a little and some of the formalin which was lodged between it and the flesh leaked out, we never should have known," de Grandin told us as he finished peeling off the coating from the statue's "heart" of human flesh. "But so intent on lasting preservation was the miscreant that he oversaturated the tissues with the formalin. *Alors,* a little of it found its way through the little, so small crack in the plaster coating, the busybody little flies must come exploring, must stick their noses into it—must die.

"I see them lying dead. 'Have not they chosen a most queer place to die?' I ask me. 'Other flies buzz at will about this theater lobby, other little flies walk with impunity upon the statue's head, its hands, its feet; but those who settle here upon its base, *parbleu,* they die all suddenly.'

"And then I smell the odor of formaldehyde. '*Que diable?*' I ask me. 'Formaldehyde, what is it doing here? In the medical dissecting-room, yes; in the preparation room of embalmers, again yes; in the lobby of a theater, in the statue of the Great God Siva—*mille nons,* it is not right or proper!'

"I look upon this statue. It are too perfect. It are not a work of art, it are, rather, an exact copy—no, a counterfeit—of life. 'Business of the monkey has been made by some one, I damn think,' I tell me. But yet I am not sure. And so I take those most unfortunate flies' small corpses and subject them to analysis. All are dead of formalin. Now I am nearly, almost certain.

"And so I go to make examination of that statue once again. I take with me a little hammer and a chisel. While no one looks, I chip a bit of it away. *Ha,* what is it that I see? Flesh, *cordieu;* woman's flesh—dead woman's flesh!

"*Ah ha, ah-ha-ha,* I apprehend it all, now. I know where those two missing girls have gone—one is the body, one is the missing arms of Siva!

"I lay my trap tonight. Once more the dance of Siva is performed, but now the police are on guard; the dancers cannot be molested. Nevertheless, I know in my own head that an attempt will be made to do them harm, and so I go to watch.

"It are even as I think. This man here draws the red herring across the trail; he fools Costello and the others to run down to the corner while his powder-squibs go *pop-pop-pop!* While they are there his helpers find an entrance to Mademoiselle Hélène's house and would have slain her with a snake if Doctor Trowbridge and I had not been there.

"*Ha,* but we are there, and I kill them all, I kill their snake, I kick their so carefully laid plans upside down, as the cow knocks over the filled milk-bucket. Yes, certainly. Their plans are nicely made but in them they have overlooked one thing.

"That thing is Jules de Grandin!"

"You lie!" the prisoner cried, almost in a scream. "You didn't kill them; you're lying!"

"You say so?" de Grandin asked sar-

castically. "Monsieur Martin, will you kindly have your young men bring what waits without to us?"

Coroner Martin stepped to the door and beckoned silently.

Without a word three of his assistants came single-file through the door, each trundling a wheeled bier freighted with a sheeted form. As they passed him, de Grandin snatched the sheets away, disclosing the bodies of the Hindoos he had killed in the rooming-house.

"And now, *Monsieur,*" he asked in a gentle voice, bowing with mock courtesy to the prisoner, "do you still have doubts of my veracity?"

The fellow stared at the three corpses in horror. His eyes seemed starting from his head as, in a choking voice, he croaked:

"Yes, yes, I did it; I killed them as you said, the wantons, defilers of the gods. I executed them for blasphemy, and I'd have killed that other pale-faced harlot, too, if you had not been here, you——"

he glared insanely at de Grandin for a moment, then raised his manacled hands to his face.

"*Sang de Dieu,* but I say you shall not!" the little Frenchman shouted, leaping on the man as a cat might pounce upon a mouse, wrestling with him violently a moment, then springing back triumphantly, a little, jet-black pill displayed between his thumb and finger-tip.

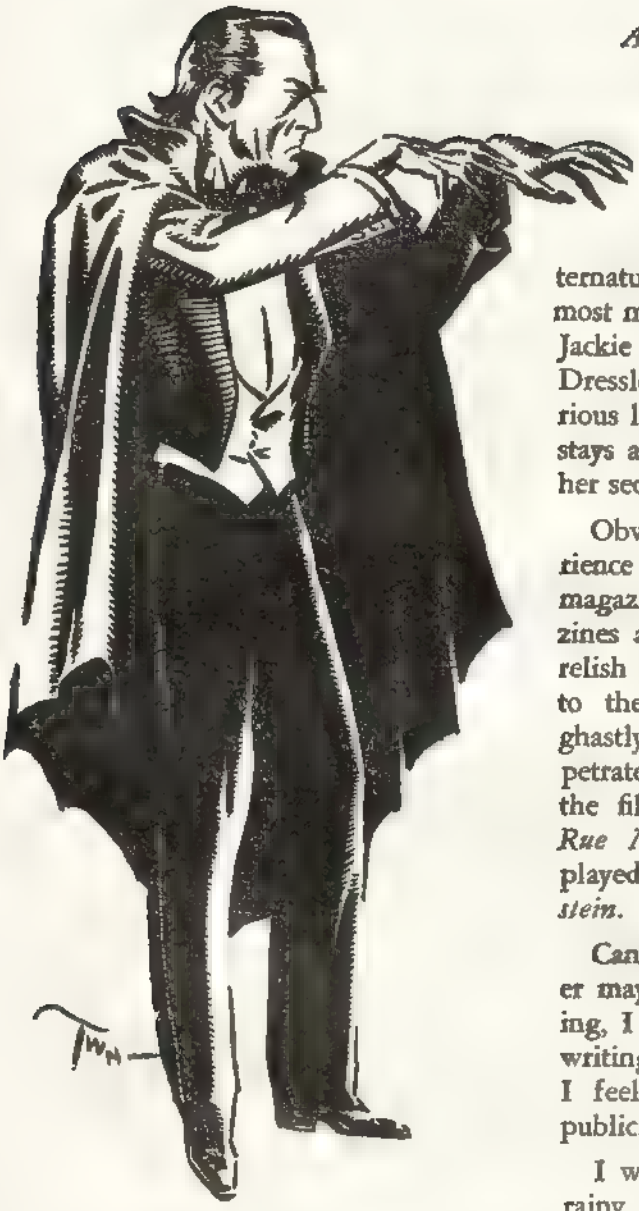
"Could he have swallowed this he would have died at once," he told us. "As it is, we shall have the pleasure of seeing him decently and legally put to death for the vile, unconscionable murderer of women that he is.

"Meantime——" His little, round blue eyes swept us one by one, finally came to rest upon Costello. "*Mon sergent,* I am most vilely and unsupportably dry," he complained. "You are well acquainted with the best speakeasies which the city boasts. Will not you, of your charity, take me where I can relieve this torment of a thirst?"

Demons of the

By THEODORE

A gigantic hoax was perpetrated on "Frankenstein" Karloff, aided



Lugosi as Dracula

FOR ten years I have been writing stories about the activities of the motion picture colony for what are known as the "fan" magazines; and, in strict justice to the movie people in and about Hollywood, I never before had an experience such as the one that befell me recently—for there is nothing weird, preternatural or otherwise affrighting about most motion picture people, from the child Jackie Cooper to the more elderly Marie Dressler. There have been, it is true, curious legends about Greta Garbo, but she stays away from interviewers. Whatever her secret, she keeps it.

Obviously, I could not relate the experience I had in the pages of a "fan" magazine. The readers of these magazines are too accustomed to sunshine to relish shadows. So I decided to submit to the readers of WEIRD TALES the ghastly details of the gigantic hoax perpetrated on me by Bela Lugosi, star of the films *Dracula* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* and Boris Karloff, who played the monster in the film *Frankenstein.*

Candidly, for reasons which the reader may surmise before he finishes reading, I have hesitated considerably about writing of just what happened, but now I feel I should make what happened public.

I was just leaving Universal City one rainy, dreary morning when John Le Roy Johnstone, Universal publicity director, called to me:

"Ted, don't go away. I just happened to think that our two demons, 'Dracula' Lugosi and 'Frankenstein' Karloff, are coming here in a few minutes. A demons'

Film Colony

LeBERTHON

the author by "Dracula" Lugosi and and abetted by the photographer

rendezvous ought to interest you. I might add that they're hastening here from opposite directions, to meet for the first time. They actually have never met. You see, *Dracula* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* in which Lugosi starred, were made here at different times than *Frankenstein,* in which Karloff played the ghastly, man-made monster. And that's why they've never met professionally. Nor have they ever met socially, although both have been in Hollywood, on and off, for several years. But you know the film colony. All split up into little groups and circles."

I didn't mind sticking around. For one thing, a murky drizzle had begun to fall outside. The mammoth Universal stages, seen through a window, seemed, in the grayness, to be enormous squat tombs, unadorned sarcophagi in which giants five hundred feet tall, stretched in death, could be laid. It might not be a bad idea, I concluded, to wait around a little, if only to give the rain a chance to stop.

"Doggoned if it isn't just the kind of a morning for a couple of monsters to meet," laughed Johnstone. "And do you know something, I've a queer hunch something funny'll happen when they meet. Not that there's any professional rivalry between them in the demon field, as far as I know; but there's been a lot of banter going around the studio about the weird possibilities, you know, the things that could happen, when Dracula meets the Frankenstein monster! Candidly, I wouldn't be surprized if they try to frame each other."

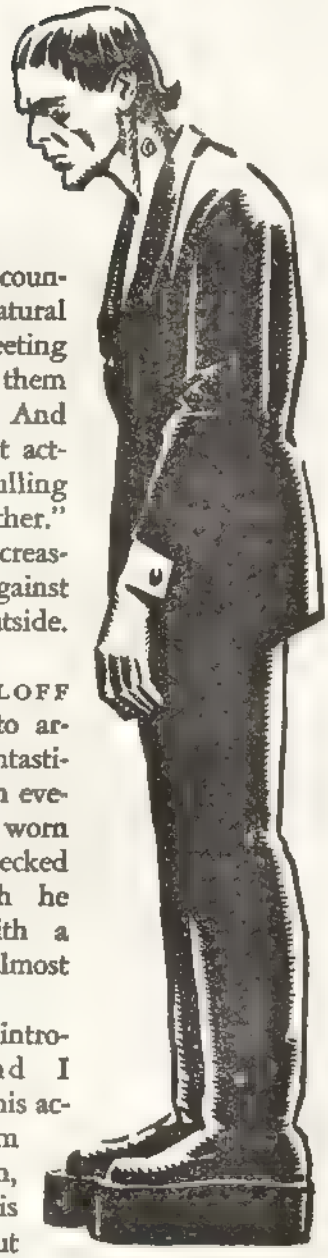
"What do you mean?" I chuckled nervously.

"Well," he countered, "it's natural that this meeting should strike them both as funny. And you know what actors are for pulling gags on each other."

The rain, increasing, muttered against the ground outside.

BORIS KARLOFF was first to arrive—and, fantastically enough, in evening clothes, worn under a rain-flecked overcoat which he tossed off with a mischievous, almost boyish fling.

We were introduced. And I learned, from his accent, then from his admission, that his name is not Karloff, but that he is an Englishman with a most unfortunate name. But we won't go into that.



Karloff as Frankenstein's monster

He is slender, debonair, graceful, with

powerful shoulders and large strong hands, smooth iron-gray hair, darkly tanned skin, and lucent, deep-set brown eyes. A witty, casual, well-bred fellow, with one of those strong-boned, hollow-cheeked countenances that seems carved out of hickory, and is characteristic of so many well-travelled, weather-beaten, distinguished-appearing Britishers.

He joked waggishly, this Englishman from God knows where, whose name is *not* Karloff, about his coming meeting with Bela Lugosi.

As he was talking, and Johnstone and I were absorbed in his high spirits, the door leading to the studio outside evidently opened. No one saw it open. In fact, we did not see anything until Karloff, who faced the door as he chatted with us, suddenly looked up and asseverated startlingly, "Oh my God!"

Johnstone and I looked around and I don't know what he thought or felt. I do know I became visibly disconcerted, to put it lightly.

There stood Lugosi, filling the doorway, quiet as death, and smiling in his curiously knowing way. It is the smile of a tall, weary, haunted aristocrat, a person of perhaps fallen greatness, a secretive Lucifer who sees too clearly and knows too much, and perhaps wishes it were not so, and would like to be a gracious chap. He, too, was in evening clothes—on a rainy morning! He advanced with a soft, springy tread.

Karloff stood up as if galvanized by some sudden irrevocable plan of action. Then he turned on the advancing Lugosi a cold, unbelieving stare that would have riveted another man in his tracks. But the tall, tapering-fingered Hungarian, drawing himself erect, continued to smile with unmistakably ghastly knowingness.

It was Lugosi's hand which was thrust forward first.

As they shook hands they seemed to lock horns with their eyes. Only for a moment, however; for both broke into ear-to-ear grins.

"I hope I didn't scare you to death," Lugosi smiled, narrowing his eyes, and seeming to look right through the quondam monster.

"I hope I didn't scare *you*," parried Karloff mirthfully.

I could not be certain, but I thought Lugosi bristled, as if his demoniacal prowess had been challenged by a tyro in demonism.

Finally he said slowly:

"I think I could scare you to death."

Karloff struck a match, lit a cigarette, puffed a couple of times, and retorted with an air of whimsical scorn:

"I not only think I can scare your ears right off, Mr. Dracula, I'll bet you that I can."

Within the next few minutes a wager of a hundred dollars had been made. They would go onto a deserted set, within one of the vast, empty, tomb-like stages squatting in the rain outside. No lights would be turned on. They would tell each other stories—such stories of darkness, terror and madness that one or the other would either faint or cry out for the other to stop. The other would then be pronounced victor.

Publicist Johnstone, grinning a bit unconvincingly, as if he were somehow ill, protested:

"There should be a referee. You go along, Le Berthon, and decide which one out-scares the other. And, I'll tell you what. Take Ray Jones, the photographer, along. He can get incontrovertible evidence."

"I don't want to oppose your wishes,"

put in Lugosi, his eyes widening like wrathful alarm signals, "but I would rather be alone with Mr. Karloff. You won't need any evidence. All you may need is a doctor, a nerve and heart specialist. You see, only one of us will walk off that stage. The other will be . . . er . . . carried off."

He said this with some heat, yet with a growing twinkle in eyes which gradually narrowed again. But Johnstone was obdurate.

And so, two tall actors in evening clothes, a photographer, and a writer walked with bowed heads and hunched shoulders in the rain to reach the stage building with its unfortunate resemblance, for me, to a colossal sepulcher.

WE ENTERED a small door in the side, nearly tripping over cables that coiled like lifeless serpents about the floor in the dank, dusky atmosphere. Photographer Jones lit a match. We found our way to a set where, among other articles of furniture, there was a davenport. It was then agreed that Jones could take photographs if he and I would stand twenty-five feet away in a dark corner, and if he would use only noiseless flash powder.

The tall actors in evening clothes sat on the davenport. In the obscure gloom we scarcely could discern their figures. But soon we were to hear a mournful voice, Lugosi's.

"Boris," he began, in a gloating sonority, "what would you say if this set, this stage, this studio, suddenly vanished, and you found that in reality you and I were sitting at the bottom of a pit? Ha! That would be inconvenient for you, wouldn't it? But of course I might provide some charming company—I might drag down into this pit an exquisite young woman. And I should indulge in a curious experiment that would cause your hair to turn white—and your stomach to turn inside out.

"Boris," he went on in a ghoulish, sickeningly exultant tone, "women are thrilled by Dracula, the suave one. Women love the horrible, the creepy, more than men. Why does a woman always tell the story of her husband's death so often and with such relish? Why does she go to cemeteries? Tenderness? Grief? Bah! It's because she likes to be hurt, tortured, terrified! Yes, Boris! Ah, Boris, to win a woman, take her with you to see *Dracula,* the movie. As she sees me, the bat-like vampire, swoop through an open casement into some girl's boudoir, there to sink teeth into neck and drink blood, she will thrill through every nerve and fiber. That is your cue to draw close to her, Boris. When she is limp as a rag, take her where you will, do with her what you will. Ah, especially, Boris, bite her on the neck!

"The love-bite, it is the beginning. In the end, you too, Boris, will become a vampire. You will live five hundred years. You will sleep in moldy graves at night, and make fiendish love to beauties by day. You will see generations live and die. You will see a girl baby born to some woman, and wait a mere sixteen to eighteen years for her to grow up, so that you can sink fangs into a soft white neck and drink a scarlet stream. You will be irresistible, for you will have in your powerful body the very heat of hell, the virility of Satan. And some day, of course, you will be discovered—a knife, after long centuries, will be plunged into you, you will groan like a dying wolf, and you will drop like a plummet into the bottomless sulfurous pit. Yes, Boris, that's the end—for you! For us! For, look at me, Boris . . . "

"Ha! Ha! Ha! You fool, Bela," came

Karloff's scornful, pealing laugh in the darkness, "why try that kindergarten stuff on me? You ask me to look at you, Bela. Well, look at me! Look . . . look . . . look . . . and take an occasional glance upward, Bela. These two hands of mine, clenched together above my head, could descend at any moment, in a second, ay, even before I finish this sentence, if I wanted them to, and they'd bash your distinguished head in as if it were an egg. Your brains would run out like the yolk of an egg, and spatter your pretty tuxedo.

"Bela, a monster created by Frankenstein is not worried by your stories of sucking blood from beauties' necks. But did *you* see the movie *Frankenstein,* Bela? Did you see *me* take an innocent little girl, a child playing among flowers, and drown her? Some sentimentalists said I did it unknowingly. Bosh! I have done it a thousand times, and will do it a thousand times again. Bela, it's dark in here, but you know me. You know it was no accident or chance, but significant, that I—the Englishman from God knows where whose name is *not* Karloff—was called upon to play that monstrous role! You know me, Bela, you know me. Why that bosh about five hundred years old? You know that both of us are nearly six thousand years old! And that we've met many times before, the last time not more than two hundred years ago. . . . And you shouldn't have made that foolish wager. Admit it, Bela!" Karloff's voice shook with deep agitation.

"I wonder," came Lugosi's reply, dreary as a fog-horn in the semi-darkness.

In the meantime, Photographer Jones in his scarce-visible corner kept snapping pictures. The noiseless powder recurrently rose in puffs, so that—spookily enough—the scene resembled the laboratory of a mediæval alchemist.

"Come, Bela—let's go. Er . . . Jones, Le Berthon," Karloff shouted hoarsely, "are you ready to go? Bela and I have found we're members of the same—well, suppose we say lodge. We're therefore, quite unable to scare each other to death, for reasons you might not understand, even to oblige you. You'll just have to call it a draw."

"All right, we're ready to go," responded Jones, nervously enough for that matter. "And—say—I've used up my last match. Will one of you fellows strike one?"

I SHALL never know whether it was Lugosi or Karloff who struck the match. All I do know is that when the match was struck it apparently revealed, not Lugosi and Karloff on that davenport, but two slimy, scaly monsters, dragon-like serpents, with blood-red, venomous eyes. The apparitional things flashed before me so suddenly that I became sick to my stomach and made a rush, on buckling legs, for the exit—and the cool air.

Just as I reached it and noted fleetingly that the rain had stopped, and that my heart was pounding to the bursting-point, and that I was strangely weak and giddy, Jones and the two tall actors in evening clothes came through the door. Jones was rather sober and unconcerned, but Lugosi and Karloff were laughing heartily over something or other.

"Will you have lunch with us?" Lugosi asked me, still grinning but with something of a physician's tender concern.

"No, thank you," I replied, scarcely looking either at him or Karloff, "I have to hurry away."

And I did hurry away.

I am, of course, now convinced that

what happened was their idea of a practical joke, that the slimy, scaly things I had seen, the things which had so frightened and sickened me in that fleeting moment, were either the imaginings of my over-wrought nerves—or some mechanically contrived illusions in which Jones had some share.

There are, of course, some who will wonder if I do not merely prefer this simple, comforting explanation to one that might cause Hollywood hostesses to fear to invite Lugosi and Karloff to social functions—and fear not to invite them!

Many people, deep down, still are superstitious. And there are many things in life we do not fully understand, such as why it is the destiny of certain human beings to portray certain roles—whether in real or "reel" life.

Kishi, My Cat

By ALICE I'ANSON

Kishi, my Cat,
With glowing eyes
  And softly flowing tail,
Did you love to dream
On a broidered mat
  While the desert stars grew pale?
Did you drowse at the feet of Ishtar, queen
  Of the Land of Ancient Guile?
Did she mimic you with her haughty mien
  And her strange Sumerian smile?

Kishi, my Cat,
I feel tonight
  Some bond betwixt us twain
That dates far back
To a time like that,
  To the great Belshazzar's reign.
You were the pet of the royal bride,
  I was chief of her dancing-maids. . . .
They buried us, too, when Ishtar died,
  And we followed her to the Shades!

The Wand of Doom

By JACK WILLIAMSON

A weird-scientific tale of synthetic creation, of ghastly monstrosities and spiders as big as horses

1. The Atavistic Terror

I BELIEVE that Paul Telfair's unnatural fear of spiders was a dark heritage from the creeping, monstrous forebears of humanity, an atavistic survival from the things that wallowed and devoured one another in the ooze and slime of the primordial mud-flats where life began.

Psychologists have agreed with me that his haunting horror can be explained only as a race-memory of some stark jungle tragedy of the dawn-ages, seared so indelibly into the germ-plasm that it was transmitted to him across the eons—a maddening terror, slumbering in the cells of life through uncounted generations, to wake in the brain of my friend, to consume him, mind and body, with the mordant corrosive of elemental terror.

But if that hideous obsession was indeed a legacy handed down from some crawling monstrosity of the reeking jungle slime, it was certainly a regrettable incident of his own early childhood that wakened it.

The sleeping fear might have slumbered on for untold generations longer, in the unexplored recesses of the germ-plasm, had it not been for the unfortunate happening that roused it, to form my friend's life to its frightful mold, to make his existence unending nightmare, and to cut off his days at the very pinnacle of ever-mounting horror.

Doctor Paul Telfair and his younger brother, Verne, were friends of mine for many years. I met them first during my student days at Tulane, where their father, the well-known naturalist, was professor of biology. Ancient French Creole blood, I knew, flowed in their veins. But the young men were both fine, modern Americans.

Paul, the elder by a dozen years, was, like his father, reserved and scholarly. His was a rare combination of scientific and artistic genius, marred only by that haunting atavistic inheritance. His ability in electrical research was early recognized with the coveted doctorate. He was an accomplished violinist. A few of his paintings have gained some distinction—fantasies somewhat suggestive of the latter Henri Rousseau, startling with their weird effects of light and color.

As might have been expected, Paul was mild-tempered, retiring, by nature introspective and imaginative. Though his manners were immaculately polished, he was almost diffident except among his very few intimate friends.

Paul never married. Verne told me, once, of his tragic first love. In his late teens he was engaged to a frail, lovely girl, a Miss Elaine LeMar. She became an invalid before the wedding, died within the year.

But I must tell of that other tragedy, in his early youth, that marked the beginning of the fear that dominated his life, of the soul-searing terror that swept him, at last, to unthinkable, inevitable doom. The awakening of the obsessive,

"The monster spider leaped out and attacked Verne."

atavistic phobia came about as a result of his father's study of the arachnids.

THE biologist, it appears, specialized in that branch of his science, and had spiders, tarantulas, and scorpions shipped to him at New Orleans from all parts of the world. From earliest infancy, Paul had a strange horror of those hideous creatures. But the phobia would probably have been outgrown—at least to the extent of allowing him to lead a normal life—had not the thing happened that awakened in full the slumbering atavistic fear, burned it indelibly upon his brain.

One night, crossing a dark room, the boy stumbled against a box containing a shipment of living tarantulas, which had just arrived from one of his father's associates in the Southwest. The box overturned and the cover fell from it, releasing the creatures that stirred in the sensitive boy the fatal fear that was his dark heritage from the fathers of men in the dawn-era jungle-ooze.

He stood there in the darkness, rigid in icy paralysis of fear. He could not run. His throat was dry and constricted, so that he could not even cry out for aid. He was riveted helpless, while the formless, devouring terror from the past wakened in him.

He told me, once, about the occasion. Horror rendered his senses preternaturally acute, he said, so that he could hear distinctly the tiny, scratching, shuffling sounds of the tarantulas' feet, as they ran about him. In the darkness they were invisible, but he could *hear* them, and he thought they were attacking him.

The talons of elemental fear, reaching up through dark mists of time, held him unnerved and powerless in their searing embrace. He had collapsed, trembling

and shrieking, when his father reached him.

Paul Telfair was able, as he grew older, to banish the atavistic terror from his waking hours. But through the rest of his life, especially when ill or fatigued, he was subject to hideous dreams of gigantic spiders. Verne always slept near him, to waken him from the nightmares, in which he battled haunting fears come down from primal life.

Verne Telfair was nearly my own age. Stocky, powerful, lively, he was far different from the tall, scholarly Paul. Naturally hot-headed and impetuous, fond of social activity, he yet remained sincerely devoted to his brother.

When I left New Orleans in 1923, to take a position in Buenos Aires, the brothers were living together in the old Telfair mansion, Paul absorbed in his experiments and his music, Verne dividing his time between social duties and the care of his more delicate brother.

Their letters, a year later, abruptly ceased. I was unable to get in touch with them, or to learn anything of them save that they had gone from New Orleans.

Upon my return I found the old house deserted. In a year of search, I learned, the police had discovered only that the brothers had vanished into the desolate bayou swamps coastward from the city.

The Telfairs had been among my dearest friends, and since I had some spare weeks at my disposal, I set out to solve the mystery of their disappearance—little suspecting the sinister and amazing chain of horror I was to unearth.

2. The Man Whose Eyes Were Haunted

It was through a New Orleans dealer in electrical equipment that I got the name of the Cajun, Henri Dubois.

The Telfair brothers, shortly before they vanished, had purchased a large amount of heavy machinery, which had been taken—for what purpose the dealer did not know—into the unreclaimed swamps. The Cajun, as Doctor Telfair's agent, had received part of the goods.

I knew little of the man. His Cajun ancestry was evident from his name and situation. His illiteracy was evinced by the signature on the receipts, a rude cross with the words, "Henri Dubois, his mark."

In the week just spent in his search I had learned that he was unmarried, that he lived alone in the most solitary part of the bayou country, emerging only rarely with furs or fish to exchange for his staple necessities of tobacco, grits, ammunition and corn whisky.

More than one person had warned me that he was "queer"—a shy, shiftless recluse, whom no one actually knew.

I found his lonely shanty-boat at sunset on an oppressive summer day. The gray-green walls of swampy forest above the black, stagnant bayou had become unpleasantly depressing. And the dwelling that I found beyond the ancient, moss-bearded cypress and red gum upon the last bend, did not relieve my depression.

It was a heavy, square-ended barge, aground in the mud, supporting an ugly shack, tar-paper roofed. Silence of desolation clung about it, only intensified by the melancholy chorus of distant frogs, welling from the dark and implacable swamps.

I climbed to its narrow strip of deck to wait return of the absent owner. As I stood there, fighting insistent mosquitoes, the swart inscrutability of the swamps darkened to a brooding and sinister gloom. I could readily imagine ghostly life animating the white, miasmic mists writhing up through bearded skeletons of trees.

When I first saw the Cajun he was

watching me suspiciously from his battered skiff, in the shadows of the dense, overhanging vegetation, a dozen yards away, fingering a rusty shotgun on his ragged knee.

Henri Dubois—I knew him at once for the man I sought—looked prematurely aged. While still abundant, his hair was iron-gray, white at the temples. Though he appeared fairly robust, his weak, querulous face was incredibly seamed and drawn.

His eyes were his strangest features. Watching me with unmistakable hostility, they roused my pity. In their depths was the ineffaceable print of some experience that had seared the man's very soul, left him a mere shaken wreck, faith and courage broken.

His was the expression of a weak man who has encountered some overwhelming emotional experience that has twisted him, burned him out, if I may put it so, leaving him dazed, uncertain of life and without much interest in living. I have seen neurotic patients in psychiatric wards with that same look.

Studying the lurking dread in his eyes, I knew that the emotion photographed there was not grief or despair—it was sheer horror.

He was not the kind, I saw at once, to give me willingly any information about his dealings with my lost friends, or even to grant me ordinary civility.

"Good evening, Mr. Dubois," I called, as cordially as I could.

He stared at me silently, hands still on the gun in his lap.

"You *are* Henri Dubois, aren't you?"

He expectorated into the green, stagnant water, nodded voiceless assent.

"My name is Walters." I managed a smile. "Edwin Walters. I'd like to ask you a few questions, if you don't mind. And I'm afraid I must impose upon your hospitality for the night—if I may."

He grunted something that I did not understand. I decided to explain myself more fully.

"I'm trying to find what became of the Telfair brothers."

The effect of my words was startling. Terror burst into his haunted eyes. He jerked back as if I had struck him, and flung up the ancient gun with shaking hands.

I hastened to assure him that I was not an officer, that I meant harm to no one. His face still strained and white, he lowered the gun, protesting in the French patois that he knew nobody named Telfair.

It was apparent that he was lying.

Before, it had not occurred to me to connect the Cajun with my friends' disappearance save as a possible source of information. But the name of Telfair had brought back to his face that fear whose shadow I had already marked there.

The brothers, then, had been involved in the experience, whatever it might have been, that had left such a print of horror upon the man. I was sure, at once, that he had knowledge of their fate, but perhaps not criminal knowledge. He looked too much the cowardly weakling to be a successful murderer.

I had blundered, I saw, in revealing my purpose so soon. In any case the man's confidence would not have been easily gained, and my incautious question had already raised a wall of mistrust before me.

Though I said no more of my quest, it took my best persuasive efforts to make him allow me to stay with him for the night. I followed him into the shanty-boat's interior, narrow, ill-furnished, pervaded with the stale, sour odor peculiar to such craft.

A meager, unkempt figure in worn blue shirt and patched denim overalls, horny feet bare, he lit the dingy kerosene lamp and prepared a rude meal of coffee, fried pork, and rugged brown pones of cold corn-bread.

When we had eaten I brought in from my motor-boat a gallon jug of corn whisky I had purchased in anticipation of the present occasion. Thin hands shaking with eagerness, my host poured generously into two tin cups, handed one to me. I sipped cautiously at the raw, bitter moonshine, while he gulped his own as easily as if it had been water—and with the same visible effect.

The second cup, however, dulled the edge of his suspicion. With the third, he became almost genial, and I ventured to mention the Telfairs again, stressing my friendship and my worry.

He admitted in his rusty patois that they had employed him, that he had helped set up the machinery in the swamp. He agreed that he could guide me to the spot on the morrow.

But he still denied vehemently that he knew what had become of my friends. My question awakened that haunting terror in his eyes, sobered him to dogged, suspicious taciturnity. I could get no more from him that night, though he drank himself into a stupor, as if to drown in alcohol the memory I had raised.

3. The Punctured Skull

THAT night I tried in vain to sleep, beneath swarming mosquitoes, my blankets spread on the floor of the stale-smelling shanty-boat.

Next morning the Cajun was morosely sullen as ever. He appeared uncertain how much he had told me, and sorry he had told me anything. When we had breakfasted upon muddy chicory-coffee and grits and pork, I insisted that he keep his promise to take me where the Telfairs had set up the machinery.

At first he refused blankly. When I offered him ten dollars, he agreed to take me to the old landing, and point out the trail. He would not accompany me away from the boat.

We ascended the bayou until it became a narrow, stagnant channel, dull green walls of swamp vegetation almost meeting above it. The Cajun poled in to a landing of rotting logs, between jutting cypress knees.

He showed me the end of the weed-choked trail, and promised to wait for me until sunset. He was not, he insisted, going to remain in that vicinity after dark.

Though the footing proved firm enough, the roadway was grown up with weeds and briars, the green, thorny tangles reaching to my waist. Gaunt trees rose about me, bearded with gray festoons of Spanish moss, their dark trunks limiting lonely vistas. The undergrowth was a luxuriant jungle, broken only by the black, decaying logs of fallen trees.

It was startling, amid such surroundings, to find a modern dynamo.

It stood upon a concrete platform that must have been a hundred feet square. The trees, for some little distance around it, had been felled; the lush jungle of undergrowth had consequently sprung up more luxuriantly. Green tangles were encroaching upon the concrete. In several places the force of imprisoned life had cracked it, bursting through in sprays of green.

The dynamo stood near the center of it, evidently long unprotected from the elements, black with rust. Beside it was the powerful gasoline motor that had driven it, grimy and corroded. A transformer, coils, condensers, rheostats lay about, smashed, ruined by rust and weather.

The silent and implacable spirit of the swamp already filled the place, and eager vegetation was fast obliterating this enigmatic scar in the tawny side of the wilderness. Fighting the loneliness of the place, and wondering at the meaning of it, I explored the conquering vanguard of the jungle until I found the skeleton.

A human skeleton, the bones scattered in the fringe of crowding weeds. I started back at first, as if this had been a dark and obscene jest of the brooding swamp, and then bent to examine them.

The skull was oddly injured. Two round holes were pierced in it, one in the frontal bone, above the left eye; the other in the occipital bone, at the back of the head, as if—and the thought came with a shudder of premonitory horror—great fangs had closed through the brain.

Searching in the dust beneath the skeleton, I found objects to identify it. A silver signet ring, bearing the initial "T". An old-fashioned, thick gold watch, which I well knew—crystal broken, works gone to rust, but case intact. Those articles told me, beyond question, that the grim remains were those of Doctor Paul Telfair.

But what dread fate could have overtaken him? I could not rid myself of my first mad idea that those puzzling punctures had been made by gigantic fangs, though reason told me the agent must have been some more credible instrument —a pick, perhaps.

I had no inkling, then, that his haunting, atavistic dread of spiders had played in the tragedy the hideous part that it did.

4. The Purple Wounds

I was three days in winning the complete confidence of Henri Dubois. I accepted his rude hospitality, regaled him with cheap whisky, and talked of my old friendship for the Telfairs until he felt maudlin sympathy. In the end, I won.

When the machinery had been installed upon the concrete floor, he told me, in his rough patois, the brothers stayed there alone. Discharging the other employees, they retained him to bring the mail and the supplies they ordered, paying him ten dollars each week to make two trips.

At first there had been no roof above the machinery. On his first trip back, Henri had been astounded to see a house over the concrete platform. A house, he said, that looked like colored glass. He was uncertain what its material actually was, or where that material had come from.

On another trip he had found a queer sort of garden about the strange house—a garden whose leaves and blooms did not move in the wind, because they were hard, like glass.

The brothers had been alone. But a woman, near the end, appeared mysteriously with them. Henri had seen her, one time, in the amazing garden. She was young and pretty. He had heard her sing, with a voice like little bells.

On its face, his story, so far, was unreasonable, fantastic, incredible. Still, I was fairly sure that it represented no deliberate fabrication on his part. His manner had been that of one who tells an improbable story unwillingly, apprehensive of doubt. And I knew that he did not have the imagination to create such a narrative as he hesitantly and reluctantly unfolded.

Almost anything can be made to seem improbable, if presented in the right way. With his narrow, warped mind, Henri Dubois would inevitably see any unusual occurrence from an illogical angle; he was sure to overlook some factors, overstress others.

I listened without betraying incredulity,

alert to sort some reasonable explanation of the mystery from his strange words.

On his last return, Verne Telfair had run down to meet him at the landing, he said. The young man was hurt, bleeding. One arm was torn; his side was strangely wounded. His clothing was ripped, bloody. Henri had taken him aboard the skiff, put off in the haste he demanded.

Some hideous, unnamable horror, he insisted, had followed Verne down the trail. He would not try to describe it; he had not even seen it clearly.

The Cajun had wanted to take Verne out to Doctor Pichon. His strange wounds were alarming. But Verne insisted that they were not serious; he had remained upon the shanty-boat. He dressed his injuries, with Henri's aid, and for several days he appeared to be recovering.

On the fifth morning Verne went into delirium, the Cajun said. Screaming. Fighting things that Henri could not see. Trying to throw himself off into the bayou. Henri had tied him to the bed.

His wounds appeared to have been poisoned. They swelled, grew purple. Henri muttered, signed the cross. He had prepared, he said, to carry Verne down to see Doctor Pichon. But on the following night he died. His whole body became purple, swelled unpleasantly.

The Cajun had not dared carry the body out of the swamp, for fear of the inevitable inquiry. He had buried it. He would show me the grave.

In the gloom of evening, Henri Dubois took me back through the brooding shadows of the swamp, to a sunken, weed-grown mound, beneath the gnarled, skeletal arms of a moss-bearded swamp oak. A rude cross, of two sticks nailed together, leaned askew at the head.

I stood watching the sinking grave for a long time, wondering if the hilarious, light-hearted Verne Telfair that I had known could indeed lie here in the dusky wilderness. It seemed incredible, blindly cruel.

Only when we had returned to the shanty-boat did Henri Dubois think to tell me that Verne had been writing in a book during the days before his sudden relapse. Henri could not read, he did not know what the writing was. He had not dared show it to any one, for fear of questions whose answers men would not believe.

Impatiently I watched him fumbling among his disorderly possessions. He pawed over piles of traps, worm-eaten peltries, balls of string, patent-medicine bottles, fish-hooks, odd rifle and shotgun cartridges.

At last he handed me a dusty laboratory notebook, rolled into a compact cylinder and tied with string. On its pages was the narrative that follows, headed like a letter, under a date four years before, and addressed to me.

I read it, there in the Cajun's malodorous dwelling. I suppose I was anticipating dark tragedy. But I was all unprepared for the lurid wings of dread that descended upon me as I turned the dusty pages, unarmed against the rending talons of terror that seized upon my soul as I neared the final act of the grim drama, the hideous and inevitable ending.

5. *A Wand of Creation*

Dear Ed [it began]—If you hear nothing from me, following this, it will mean that I have not survived my injuries. I have dressed and disinfected them as well as facilities permit. I am almost free from pain, today, and have every hope of recovery. My wound, though, is unique; I don't know what turn my condition will next take. I am

penning this brief account of the affair for your eyes, in case—anyhow, I shall address it, and tell Henri Dubois to mail it.

Henri insists that I let him take me out to medical aid. But I have washed the wounds, sprinkled permanganate in them. I doubt that a doctor could do anything else—my trouble, of course, is quite beyond ordinary medical experience. And my appearance could only result in unwelcome publicity, and the necessity for explanations that I am unwilling to make. In no sense am I responsible for Paul's death, but under the circumstances, the accusation might be made, and the story of it all is so bizarre that I should be helpless to prove it in a court of law.

You are, I think, the only human being likely to be much disturbed over the accident. I can't fancy any one else tearing his hair over it. For some time I have neglected our correspondence, for reasons that will become evident as you read. This will serve to explain our silence—and in case you hear nothing more, our disappearance. If I recover, as I have much hope of doing, I intend to join you immediately in South America, where I can add with my own lips any further details you may desire.

But preliminaries enough, except to hope that I can follow this letter very shortly, to renew old fellowship and forget what has happened here.

Paul must have been working for many years on his fatal discovery before I knew anything of it. You know how reticent he always was about any of his unproved theories.

I first learned of it one day, a few months ago, when I came home from a week's shooting on Colonel Allen's plantation—it was the first time I had been away from home so long, in ages. I found Paul sitting by a table covered with radio apparatus—tubes, condensers, transformers, variocouplers. There must have been two dozen tubes in the bank; I noticed they were of unusual pattern. A little motor-generator was humming in the corner. Paul wore a sort of headband, which held against his temples two little black disks; at first glimpse it appeared to be a set of ordinary phones.

"Going in for D X?" I asked him.

He took the apparatus from his head—I saw now that it was not a set of phones at all—and smiled up at me in a queer way.

"No, Verne, I'm not trying for distance," he said, in his tantalizingly slow voice. "But how did you find the quail?"

I was just beginning to see that his equipment was not a radio set at all, but something far different—and, his manner told me, important.

"Then what is the little toy?" I demanded.

"Think you could stand a shock?" he asked, and picked up the odd little headpiece. "Meaning something rather startling."

"I guess so."

He paused, then laid the little instrument back on the table.

"Verne, I suppose you've heard about the Hindoo fakirs who plant a seed in barren soil, wave their hands above it, and raise a tree before the eyes of their spectators. And perform similar impossible feats?"

"I think so. What of it?"

"You don't seem to take the matter very seriously. But plenty of credible travelers have reported such apparent miracles."

"Just hypnosis, isn't it?"

"That's the commonly accepted explanation. It is certain that the fakirs accomplish their wonders through their powers of intense concentration, gained

by long practise. But I have a new theory as to what their method really is. And I have devised this instrument to amplify the comparatively weak and uncertain mental emissions that I believe they use——"

"You mean to tell me you are going in for parlor magic?" I burst out. And I could hardly repress a laugh at the picture of my grave, sedate brother as a magician in a black top-hat.

"Hardly," he said. "But I have stumbled on something rather big. The principle, I suspect, has been known in the East for centuries. But it was left for me to apply to it modern electronics. As far as that goes, I can already perform a few tricks that would be rather baffling, I think, to the unscientific magician."

"Let's see them?" I challenged.

The idea of my conservative brother engaged in any sensational research was rather startling. But I was unable to doubt his words; I knew that he was no practical joker.

"Name your trick," he said, smiling.

"Well—" I hesitated. "Can you grow a tree out of the floor? That would be quite satisfactory."

To my considerable surprize, he nodded calmly, and inquired, "What sort of tree?"

"An orange tree would do nicely," I said, determined to keep even, if it were only a joke, after all. "Have it full of blooms and ripe oranges. You might add a few big red apples, for good measure."

"Very well," he said, and reached for his head-piece again. But he paused, and looked back at me. "Perhaps I had better explain it a little, first. I don't want to startle you too much."

"You can't get out, that way!" I said. "But then—if you think you can tell me how to grow oranges out of the floor, go ahead."

That seemed to touch him, slightly. He turned back to his table of apparatus, and adjusted the head-set so that its black disks were against his temples, which, I now noticed, were shaven. With a slow, confident, almost tantalizing smile, he looked up at me and said:

"Don't forget you asked for it."

He turned the dial of a rheostat on the table, and the long row of queer electron tubes lit dimly. Then he leaned back in his chair, with his eyes closed. I stood watching him, a little anxiously I admit, despite my skepticism.

For a few seconds his brow was furrowed with intense concentration. Then he looked up at me again, with that slow, quizzical smile on his thin face. Deliberately he slipped off the head-set, and laid it back on the table.

"I suppose I'm to laugh, now?" I inquired, a little acidly.

He replied, in his maddeningly slow voice, "Verne, you might look behind you."

I spun around. And I suppose I cried out with amazement.

A small orange tree stood there, apparently rooted in the floor. Masses of white blossoms shone against the dark, rich green of its foliage. It was laden with bright, golden fruit. And on one branch was a cluster of red apples!

I stood gaping at it, fatuously.

"Would you care to gather some of the fruit?" the slow, amused voice of my brother penetrated my daze.

Weakly, wondering what trick he was playing upon my senses, I walked toward it. I half expected it to vanish before me, but it remained apparently substantial. I reached out a cautious hand, and touched one of the apples.

It felt firm, cool, slick-skinned, in all respects like a natural fruit. I pulled it.

The stem snapped with an audible sound. The quivering bough rustled, and an orange fell to the floor with a soft thud.

"Step back, and I'll turn off the power," Paul said.

I moved hastily away from the amazing tree. A faint click came from Paul's instruments. And the tree was suddenly gone. There was a flash of bluish light, a snapping crackle of electricity in the air. The apple had vanished from my hand, my arm jerked to a strong shock.

"Now," my brother suggested, smiling at my amazement, "perhaps you will be more willing to listen to my explanation."

I walked uncertainly to a chair, and sat down, incredulity struggling with the evidence my senses had received.

"You can see this table, can't you?" he began.

"Why, yes."

"And when you look away from it, you can still see an image of it, when I say *table?*"

"Of course, but what——"

"What is the difference between the table and your mental image of it?"

"The table is real, it is matter. And the image is—well, just an image. But I don't see——"

Paul was smiling at me, fingering the black disks of his head-set.

"The difference is purely one of energy," he said. "The image in your mind is a phenomenon of mental energy. And any student of physics could tell you that the table is composed merely of 'arrested energy.' Every atom in it is simply a set of balanced charges of positive and negative electricity. It isn't really *solid,* as it looks; no matter is. It is merely a 'space-lattice' of vibrating energy. Relatively speaking, it is about as empty as cosmic space with a few stars and planets scattered through it. Any bit of what we call matter is merely a 'frame' composed of vibrating electrons. And the electrons, the vibrating charges of electricity, are so far apart that all those that make up the earth, packed close together, would form a sphere less than a mile in diameter."

I stopped him. "What has all that to do with growing trees out of the floor?"

"These things you mistook for telephones," he said, "are coils that pick up mental energy—though largely chemical, the activity of the brain gives rise to subtle electrical emanations. And the rest of the apparatus serves simply to amplify the picked-up energy a few billion times, and to project it, through the application of a new trick of wave-propagation I have come across, to become fixed in a space-frame of vibration that might be termed temporary matter. In other words, I can amplify my thoughts or mental images, until they are powerful enough to be fixated, for the time being, in what amounts to real matter."

"That's unreasonable," I protested.

"Rather astonishing, I suppose," he said. "But you have seen it done."

"You mean that tree was real?"

"It was as real, while it lasted, as any matter. The fixation was only temporary. I haven't power enough, here, to build up a permanent space-frame. But may I create something else for you?"

"Create!" The word struck me like a blow.

"Certainly. What else would you call it? Verne, this apparatus is a wand of creation!"

"You can—can create other things?" I stammered.

"Of course. Anything that I can imagine. I can materialize all my dreams into realities. I have only to form a clear mental image; the mental energy is picked up, amplified, fixated in the form of matter.

"There are just two limitations. Because I have so little power available, the space-frames are unstable, and collapse as soon as the power is shut off. And I haven't yet been able to create anything really alive. The forms of animals are easy enough, but they are always motionless, lifeless.

"With greater power, I think, I can overcome both difficulties."

"You want to create life?" Something in me was outraged.

"Naturally. I am going to follow the experiment to its logical end—try the full power of my wand of science."

A surge of something akin to horror rose in me. I am not religious. As the son of a biologist, I came naturally to accept the theory of creative evolution. But it seemed to me, none the less, a sacrilege to tamper with the power of creation.

"Better leave the creation of life to Nature," I said. "I'm afraid, Paul, you're playing with fire."

He laughed at me, amusedly, held out the odd head-set.

"Want to try it, Verne?"

I started back, instinctively. "I'll have nothing to do with it!" I cried. "Paul, you are mad to aspire to creation! It's not only dangerous, but somehow—well, *wicked!*"

He laughed again, tolerantly, and slipped the little black disks back over his temples.

"Forget your conventional prejudices, Verne. My wand of science is destined to make over the world!"

I was startled, horrified, by the insane daring of his plan. But he had spared me knowledge of the full extent of his fatal ambition. I did not know that he hoped not only to create life but to recreate the dead. That he hoped to resurrect the fair girl that death had taken from him. That he aspired to cheat the grave!

6. *The Lonely Laboratory*

In the course of a few days I became familiar with the wonders of my brother's amazing invention, and the instinctive horror with which I had at first regarded its use was almost forgotten. I became able to watch the startling creations of his "wand of science" without much emotion, though I was still unable to bring myself to use the instrument.

He refused to yield to my arguments against the use of the agency for the creation of life. But I think my opinions were largely responsible for his decision to move his apparatus to some isolated spot, where he could try his experiments on a larger scale, in secrecy and without fear of interference.

We decided upon some spot in the wooded swamps along Chicot Bayou. There we could be completely secluded, yet not far from civilization. I had some knowledge of the country, from fishing and hunting trips, and we employed a Cajun, Henri Dubois, who had once been my guide, to help find a location where the ground was firm enough to support heavy apparatus, and which would be sufficiently accessible.

Much as I opposed Paul's plan, it never occurred to me not to help carry it out. Despite his strange scientific enthusiasm, my brother was still the quiet, cultured gentleman for whom I held such affection. As always, he remained dependent on me to care for his practical affairs. I could not desert him merely because of disagreement with his scientific aims.

Too, his long hours of labor over the details of his invention brought increasingly frequent recurrence of those hideous nightmares that always came upon him as a result of illness or fatigue. Almost nightly I had to wake him from a rigid paralysis of terror, in which he lay trembling, covered with sudden chill sweat,

gasping for breath and making little strangled cries.

Sometimes he told me of his dreadful dreams. They were all of gigantic spiders. Sometimes huge black tarantulas appeared from nowhere, he said, in endless swarms, and pursued him relentlessly over dark, illimitable plains, until he was seized with the rigid paralysis, unable to escape them.

Or more often, he said, a harmless object, or even a familiar person, would change, by slow and hideous degrees, into a colossal spider, while he watched, frozen in stark and helpless fear.

These nightmares, of a type familiar enough to psychiatrists, were a natural result, of course, of that scar left upon his mind by his unfortunate childhood experience—but none the less torturing.

I could not leave him, of course, to endure such mental agony without the aid and comfort I could give.

In New Orleans we purchased equipment for assembling a far larger and more powerful installation than any with which he had experimented. Reaching the chosen site by water, we laid down a large concrete floor, and mounted upon it our large dynamo, with the powerful motor that was to drive it, and the other apparatus.

To my considerable surprize, Paul made no provision for a roof to shelter the equipment, nor for any lodgings for ourselves, though he had a supply of food left for us.

When the installation was at last completed, after several days of work, the Cajuns we had employed departed through the swamp, leaving the two of us alone with the apparatus.

The eeriness of it all almost overcame me, as I gazed from the edge of the newly-laid platform down the trail, where the backs of the laborers were vanishing in the tawny forest gloom. The hoarse and interminable croaking of frogs rose in the distance, sounding through the twisted, moss-tufted trees, weirdly ventriloquial, infinitely depressing.

We were alone in the midst of primordial nature—its swarthy and implacable solitude might have been pre-human. The heavy vapors of the swamp wrapped dank fingers about me as I stood there, and I felt chill forebodings that my reason could not shake away.

My brother, however, appeared unconscious of the hostile and resistless spirit of the swamp. Having started the motor and the dynamo, he called me to him, and gave me brief directions for tending them.

Then he turned to his more delicate apparatus, which was set up on a long bench beside the dynamo. Closing his circuits to light the banks of huge, oddly formed tubes, he fitted in place the twin black disks of the head-set, closed his eyes, and assumed an expression of intense, concentrated effort.

At the moment, I was filled with a wild, almost uncontrollable impulse to stop the motor and smash the banks of weirdly glowing tubes—and what unspeakable horror might have been averted had I done so!

7. *The Shining House*

I was witness, that night, to the most astounding miracle that science had ever wrought. In the passing days I had lost part of the bewildered anxiety inspired by the first exhibition of the new instrumentality. I could understand that the process of "fixation," as Paul termed it, was a logical application of relatively simple natural laws. But, despite myself, I still regarded the "wand of science" with an awe not free from haunting dread.

My brother stood before his bank of instruments, with the black disks upon his

temples, his quiet dark face rigid in concentration. The quiet humming of the dynamo changed a little, as the load came upon it, and the powerful motor labored.

Walls came into being around us, upon the floor of concrete, shutting out the dank breath of the darkening swamp—walls erected silently, as if by swift, invisible elfin hands.

They seemed to be of some polished, translucent stone, whose depths were filled with pale, roseate opalescence. They gleamed softly, like rose quartz held against the light. In a few seconds we, with the apparatus, were enclosed in a long room, walled with rose-hued stone, and roofed with the sullen sky of dusk.

In one end was a broad, arched doorway, hung with shimmering white curtains bright as woven wire of silver, adorned with a fantastically conceived design in scarlet and black. Even in my amazement, I was conscious of a sudden strong desire to part the argent hangings, to see what mysteries might lie beyond.

Then a roof sprang over the room—a lofty vault of dark green crystal, seeming luminous with an inner light deep as the shadowed green of forest gloom.

A little anxiously, Paul put the headset from him, and shut off the power from the dynamo. I expected the amazing room about us to vanish in a blaze of released electricity, as his other "fixations" had always done. But rosy walls and emerald vault remained apparently substantial.

"You see that I was right, Verne," he said softly. "With the additional power, the space-frames are more permanent."

"You mean these walls will last like real matter?"

"They are real matter," he said; "that is, arrested energy. But I haven't been able to fixate as much energy in them as ordinary matter contains. They are unstable—the light they radiate is proof enough that they are disintegrating. They probably will be broken down completely in a few days—if we don't turn on the power again, occasionally, and build them back."

I left the dynamo, and came to him.

"Paul," I pleaded, "let's give it up, and go back to New Orleans."

He looked at me with a kindly smile. "Homesick for your wine, women, and song, eh?" he said. "Well, Verne, with the wand of science I can soon provide them all for you, right here."

"No," I said anxiously, "it isn't that! I simply can't help feeling that we are usurping forbidden powers. I know, if we keep on, something terrible is going to happen!" I could not help flushing at the mild, amused sarcasm in his brown eyes. "Call it what you will," I finished desperately, "premonition, hunch—I know that trouble will come, if we keep on!"

"Sorry you feel that way, Verne," he said. "But we haven't touched the possibilities of it, yet. I'd be insane to give up now. But you may go back, if you like, and I'll stay on alone."

"You know I couldn't leave you here by yourself!"

Impulsively he came over to me and took my hand. But he was stedfast in his refusal to abandon the experiment.

THROUGH all the night Paul remained at his instruments, seeming lost in a sort of artistic frenzy. Strange light of exultant power burned in his dark eyes; for hours on end he remained silent, rigid, engrossed in his labor of creation.

At dawn he wearily turned from the long bench, and stopped the humming generator. He lifted the curtain of shimmering white, in the end of the rose-walled room, and we went out to inspect

the edifice he had created, or to use his own term, "fixated."

To understand that building, castle, palace—I hardly know what to call it—it is necessary to understand something of my brother's gloomy and imaginative nature. For it was a work of imagination, made manifest without the limitations of ordinary art or achitecture.

The same weird and melancholy fancy was evident in its crimson-windowed walls and many-towered roof that Paul had always displayed in the haunting minors of his compositions for the violin, in the macabre and startling grotesqueries of his paintings.

The building was not remarkably large. It covered merely the concrete foundation we had prepared, which was approximately one hundred feet square. Its four floors communicated through a spiral stair in the great central tower which lifted its ebon height above the crenelated parapets of the roof.

The material of all the castle had the solid appearance of stone, but with an odd effect of translucent luminescence—due, Paul said, to the disintegration of its impermanent space-frame, and the consequent radiation of its energy as light. The radiance of the walls was so strong that we needed no other source of illumination in the building.

The palace must have been an old dream of my brother, for it bore no evidence of hasty planning. Every detail was vital to the dominating impression of the whole. It must have been conceived and executed as the expression of a single mood, to catch and fix one moment of barbaric, melancholy fantasy.

Strange and striking were the colors of its lucent stuff. Towers of dead and ebon darkness, of sullen gold of sunset. High domes of frozen, empyreal violet. Oval windows glazed with blood-red crystal, whose ghastly radiance flowed in fatal floods across long halls jet-roofed and pillared with ebony, floored with ghostly silver.

True, there were lighter effects. Suites whose predominant tones were cool, restful greens and soothing saffrons and softly melancholy browns. But they served only to emphasize, by contrast, the grotesque strangeness of the castle as a whole.

We climbed to the summit of the central black tower, and looked away across the vast dark sea of green, wooded swamps, still dim and mysterious in the mists of dawn, exhaling an exotic atmosphere of primal power well in harmony with the eery and fantastic wonder of this castle of dreams that Paul had made physically manifest with his "wand of science."

Paul stood silent beside me for a time, looking away at the dark swamps, then down at the eldritch fantasies of violet domes below us, and towers of jet and sullen gold. In his dark eyes was a strange and fervid fire.

"This is just the beginning, Verne!" he cried, his voice quickened with the intoxication of limitless power. "The dwelling is done. Now we shall people it, with beings of our own creation!"

I caught up his hand, apprehensively, appealing.

"You don't mean that!" I cried. "You mustn't try that, Paul. You won't try to create life—human life! Promise me!"

He gravely shook his head.

"I'm sorry you're opposed to it, Verne. But that has been my aim, from the beginning. Think what it will mean to be able to mold human beings, perfect, flawless——"

"You won't try that!" I pleaded. "It would be madness!"

He drew away his hot hand.

"No, Verne, I'm not mad. A little drunk, if you insist, with the idea of it. . . . And why not go on a spree—when we have the power of gods? You've celebrated, many a time, with less excuse!"

"Perhaps," I said. "But there's a lot of difference between emptying a friendly bottle, and running amuck with the power of creation!"

Laughing tolerantly at my vehemence, he turned without speaking to lead the way back down the spiral stair.

8. *The Bright Butterfly*

THE dazed and bewildered incredulity upon the face of Henri Dubois, when he returned four days later with mail and supplies, was a sight I shall not forget. We were expecting him, and I had opened the postern gate before he appeared. I was standing in the gleaming emerald portal when he came in view along the narrow trail we had cut from the bayou.

For a moment he stood staring, half concealed in the green riot of undergrowth, his lean, unshaven face a very mask of astounded unbelief. Then, screaming something in French regarding the works of the devil, he dropped his pack and fled down the trail.

Calling to him not to be alarmed, I followed him. I found him on his knees, back on the landing, praying but ready to embark at a moment's notice. After some explanation and persuasion, he returned to the castle with me, to carry the supplies he had brought. Upon the promise of a substantial increase in his remuneration, he agreed to continue his trips. But nothing would have tempted him to enter the building; he always regarded it as the work of an unhallowed power.

Paul and I lived, for the most part, in a long, palatially splendid room on the first floor, furnished with a richness almost barbaric. The deep-piled rugs were finer than ever came from Samarkand. The tapestries that hung on the marble-white walls were weirdly patterned as opium dreams. The elaborate furniture might have been designed for the setting of a futuristic drama.

I prepared our meals in a smaller room adjoining, from the supplies the Cajun brought—we were forced to depend upon outside sources for bodily necessities, since the stuff fixated by Paul's apparatus, "matter" though it may have been, was too unsubstantial to serve as food.

My brother spent many hours each day with his integrator. He made small additions to the castle, in the way of furnishings and such works of art as tapestries, pictures, and statues, which he had only to image clearly in his mind to make manifest as tangible realities.

From the first, however, the chief end of his labors seems to have been the creation of life, and he was continually changing his technique and the arrangement of his equipment, with that in view.

In the course of his early efforts in that direction, he fixated or integrated a garden in the cleared space about the castle. The fruit of his efforts was weird as one of Henri Rousseau's jungle paintings, and as motionless. Leaves and stems were rigid as if cast in green metal; huge and gorgeous blooms were hard and lifeless as if carved from mammoth gems by hand of elfin jeweler.

The Cajun experienced a second alarm when he walked from the darkness of the swamp into the strange bright splendor of that crystal garden. A second increase in his pay was required to overcome his new apprehensions.

Undaunted by his failures, Paul worked on—while I prayed silently that he might never succeed.

"I think that living things will require greater concentration of energy," he told me one day in the laboratory. "The space-frame must be not only definitely formed, but filled in pretty fully, to keep alive the fire of life."

Again I began my old argument against the wisdom of the experiment.

"Life is a holy thing. You have no more right to create human beings than you have to murder them——"

"Forget it, Verne," he said. "Let's go up and watch the sunset from the tower."

He smiled, took my arm in his, and led the way toward the stair in the central tower. His obsession forgotten for the moment, he was my brother again, human and sympathetic.

FROM the crown of the ebon minaret, we watched the sullen sun drop into the wild, far-flung ocean of desolate green. And when we had returned to the empty, barbaric splendors of our living-room, he took his violin and played for me many of the simple old tunes that I have loved since childhood.

"Must be lonely here, eh, Verne?" he asked, smiling at me gravely, almost tenderly. "Far from the old flesh-pots! I must try to make myself a more entertaining companion."

Then the mad, eager enthusiasm flared up again in his dark eyes, and he added, strangely, "Or make you another companion!"

The excitement attending his momentous accomplishments and the nervous strain of his long hours of concentration in the laboratory were telling heavily upon my brother. Despite all my care, he became thin and haggard; I feared collapse.

His mental state was even more alarming than his physical condition. That pathologic fear of spiders to which he had fallen the unfortunate victim in his youth was obsessing him more violently. The frightful dreams returned with increasing frequency. Almost nightly I had to wake him, trembling, strangling, from the paralysis of nightmare. And I knew that often he lay awake for hours, fighting the sleep that would mean return of the appalling visitations.

Never before, to my knowledge, had he been troubled with somnambulism. But as the strain of his efforts wore him down, I found him, several times, walking in his sleep. On each occasion he had risen from his bed in our common room and started down the hall toward the laboratory as if to continue his labors.

I made his alarming condition another argument for giving up the experiment, and urged him to come out to New Orleans with me, to consult a psychiatrist, or at least to forget his work long enough for a thorough rest.

With his usual lack of regard for my opinions, he refused; and continued his work without any consideration for his health, often remaining in the laboratory for twenty hours a day, and having me bring his meals there—frequently to be left untasted.

Nearly a month we had been alone in the amazing castle, when one day he came eagerly to me in our magnificent living-room, holding in a trembling hand a small moth or butterfly, whose fluttering wings, uniquely marked, shone with a strange violet iridescence.

"I've done it, Verne!" he cried, hoarse with excitement. "I've done it!"

"Done what?" I asked, puzzled at his extreme agitation.

He stood holding the bright little insect out toward me, trembling, licking dry lips, evidently too excited to speak again. His bright, feverish eyes were staring at me oddly.

I bent over the butterfly, studied its glistening wings.

"Found a new species?" I asked, wonderingly. "I don't know——"

With an effort, he seemed to recover his old calm, reserved composure.

"Yes, Verne," he said slowly, "it does belong to a new species. In fact, it is the only one of its kind that ever existed. You see, I created it, myself."

9. *Elaine*

For several days following he immersed himself in his work so deeply that I feared for his health. The alarming recurrent nightmares allowed him little sleep, even when he would take time to lie down; he became distressingly haggard and nervous.

I met him one evening as he came from the laboratory, seized his thin shoulders. He was so tired he could hardly stand; his thin, pallid face was like a mask of death; his dark-rimmed eyes dull and lifeless.

"Paul, you aren't going back in that laboratory," I told him. "Not if I have to smash it, to keep you out. You're killing yourself!"

He smiled at me, wanly, agreed in a weary voice, "Yes, Verne, I suppose I have been working too hard."

"I have supper ready for you," I told him. "You are going to eat it. And then I'm going to put you to bed and keep you there!"

To my surprize, he made no resistance.

"All right, you win, Verne. I promise to stay out of the laboratory—except just to turn on the power a few minutes a day, to keep the castle from disintegrating."

Rejoicing, I gave him supper and saw him to bed, without ever suspecting what he had accomplished. To my delight, his sleep was sound and untroubled. I sat beside him all night, but my care was unnecessary, for he scarcely moved; his weary face was relaxed, almost smiling.

He was still sleeping when my vigil was terminated by a most unexpected interruption.

"Oh-h!" came a low cry of surprize from the door of the long, magnificent room. Then a clear, pleasant feminine voice said, "Good morning."

Mute with astonishment, I sprang to my feet, to see that a young woman had come into the room, walking so silently across the deep-piled rug that I had been unaware of her entrance.

Slender, tall, with pale, lovely skin, she looked singularly attractive. Her large eyes, limpidly dark, were aglow with a frank and innocent candor. Upon her oval, fine-featured face were writ keen intelligence and penetrating, sympathetic humor. She held herself gracefully erect; her presence was somehow striking, almost commanding, even though she was attired most informally in a pale blue slip that came only to her knees. Her dark hair, long, luxuriously heavy, fell in loose, glistening wavy tresses about her shoulders. Slim, rounded arms were bare, as were her legs below the blue slip, and her small, high-arched, white-skinned feet.

Ordinarily, I think, I am not abashed in the presence of lovely women, even under such extremely informal circumstances. But on this occasion I found myself staring stupidly at the girl. Nothing could have startled me more than her sudden appearance, situated as we were in the midst of the swamps, which it was obviously impossible that she could have crossed in her present attire.

"Beg your pardon," I jerked out at last. "Good morning to you."

"I'm glad I found you," she said at

once, with a naïve sweetness of manner that put me immediately at my ease, if it did not end my wonder at her presence. "You must be Verne?"

"Yes, I'm Verne Telfair," I said, more than ever astonished that she should seem to know me. Attempting in vain to recall having seen her before, I went on mechanically, "A pleasure, indeed. This is quite a lonely hole. I hadn't seen anybody for ages. You rather startled me."

"Oh, I'm so sorry." She seemed faintly puzzled.

"That's all right. It's worth quite a shock, to see you."

"I'm Elaine," she informed me, with enigmatic simplicity.

"You're just in time to save the day," I told her, attempting a more vigorous sally. "I was in a fair way to become a vegetable. What's doing out in the big world, anyhow?"

A little frown of bewilderment appeared on her oval face.

"I'm glad if I can help you," she said, her clear tones troubled, doubtful. Abruptly she inquired, solicitously, "How is Paul feeling this morning?"

"Oh, Paul? Why, he slept well. The best he has in weeks. He's still asleep, in fact." And I added, "So you know my brother?"

"Of course," she replied, not very enlighteningly. "I suppose you are well, Verne?"

"Always."

"I shall be glad when Paul wakes, so we can talk with him."

"You called to see him?"

My amazement was exceeding all bounds. I could not imagine how the girl had reached the castle; certainly she had not crossed the swamps afoot, for her clean body was neither scratched with briars nor splashed with mud.

Other questions puzzled me. How had she got inside, when the massive gates of the castle could not be opened from without? Why had she walked so confidently into the room, in negligee? How did she come to be on terms apparently so intimate with my brother, who, so far as I knew, had no close friends?

Her reply only increased my bewilderment.

"No, I didn't call. You see, I was already here."

"Already here!" I ejaculated, rather rudely I fear. "I beg your pardon, Miss—Miss Elaine, but where did you come from?"

"Why, Verne, I've been here—always!"

For an instant I was dumfounded. Then a suspicion of the truth flashed over me. In a moment the question was on my lips. But I did not speak it. It seemed somehow indelicate.

For the second time, I was confused and flustered by her presence—though through no fault of her own. I cast about for a means of making her comfortably at ease until I should have an opportunity to question my brother privately.

"Won't you sit down, Miss Elaine?"

"Thank you, Verne."

With unconscious grace she seated herself in one of the great, luxurious chairs, while I admired again the innocent, burgeoning beauty of her white body.

"An unusual picture, isn't it?" I said, pointing to one of Paul's studies on the wall, a rather grim, symbolic fantasy in crimson and black.

Her dark eyes moved toward it quickly.

"Yes, it's ably done," she said. "But I'd like it better if it were happier. We must encourage Paul. He's too gloomy. I hope I can make him happier."

My brother slipped out of bed, a few

minutes later, and came toward us, in pajamas.

The girl sprang up and ran to meet him. Throwing her bare arms around him with childish eagerness, she kissed his weary face with full, delicate red lips.

"Verne says you slept all night, Paul!" she cried warmly. "I'm so glad. How do you feel now?"

"Better, Elaine, my dear," he said, in kindly tones, with his arms around her fair body. "I'm a new man!"

"Splendid!" she cried, and kissed him again.

"You are all right?"

"Of course. I was awake early. I watched the dawn through the windows, and then came down here and found Verne."

His arms still around her, cherishingly, Paul turned to me.

"Good morning, Verne. I don't believe I told you about Elaine."

"You certainly didn't."

"I wanted you to meet her, first," he said. "You were so opposed——"

"So that's why you were so surprized!" cried the girl, suddenly. "You didn't know about me!"

"You mean——" I began, and hesitated. The subject seemed impossible, in the presence of the girl. "You mean that she—that Miss Elaine——"

The girl herself answered the question, with her direct candor.

"You see, Verne," she explained simply, "Paul made me."

Even though I had already suspected it, the truth seemed incredible.

"Yes," said my brother, "Elaine is the latest creation of the integrator. What do you say now, Verne, to the creation of human life?"

There was no answer. I watched the girl turn back to Paul and slip her smooth white arms caressingly around him again.

10. Love Resurrected

ELAINE was a most astonishing young woman. She puzzled and bewildered me more than did any other of Paul's creations. The very fact of her existence was almost beyond belief. Even to the end, it was hard for me to accept the fact that he had brought into being a mature and intelligent human being. But there was never any doubt of Elaine's reality, nor of her lovely humanity.

She was, of course, simply another creation of Paul's mind, made physically real through the amazing instrumentality of his "wand of science." And if her glorious reality was startling, it was no more remarkable than that of a few great characters of fiction, also creations of the human mind.

The love of his tragic youthful attachment had been Elaine LeMar. In this fair being of his own creation I recognized many of the traits, physical and mental, of the lost Elaine. In a sense, she was merely a resurrection of his old love—but only, of course, as he had remembered and idealized her.

She gave herself to my brother in unreserved devotion, and he displayed a passionate affection for her. That, I suppose, was inevitable, since she was his perfect ideal, and since in her creation he would naturally have eliminated any traits that might have been incompatible with his own nature.

For almost a month she and Paul lived in perfect happiness. They were invariably together, strolling through the bright halls of the castle, climbing the spiral stair to look from the black central tower across the swarthy wilderness of the swamps, merely sitting side by side in some splendid room.

I might have found the period tiresome had I not, myself, taken a tremendous liking for Elaine. She appeared to

return that liking—with no lessening, of course, of her entire devotion to Paul.

To my vast relief, my brother had completely ceased his experiments, surrendering himself completely to the joys of Elaine's companionship. He did not enter the laboratory save to run the dynamo for a short time each day, to build up the "fixations" of energy in the castle—and in the lovely body of Elaine herself—which was continually dissipated through a process of disintegration.

For the first time in many years, Paul slept in complete freedom from his haunting dreams of terror. Absence of worry, rest, and the stimulating influence of Elaine's companionship seemed to have completely banished the phobia. Not only did his nightmares cease, but he walked no more in his sleep.

His apparent recovery led me to make a fatal mistake.

Not wishing to intrude upon his and Elaine's intense communion, I removed my sleeping-quarters to a smaller room adjoining the long chamber which Paul and I had both occupied. The girl promised to call me if he ever seemed restless or disturbed in his sleep.

I anticipated no evil; we were totally unprepared for the dreadful thing that happened.

11. The Doom From a Dream

I do not remember any specific thing that wakened me on that fatal night. Subconsciously I must have become aware of some faint sound. I am a light sleeper, probably because of the years I cared for Paul, keeping alert, even in sleep, for sounds of his distress. On that night I was suddenly awake, and filled with the positive, inexplicable conviction that my brother was in trouble.

On my feet in an instant, I ran through the curtained doorway into the long room adjoining. In the soft, clear light radiated by the walls, I saw that Paul and Elaine were gone.

For a moment I was motionless, dumfounded. Then, recalling Paul's recent sleep-walking, I knew in an instant what had happened. He had risen, without waking, and gone out, probably toward the laboratory. And Elaine, aware of his going, had followed without thinking it necessary to disturb me.

The swiftly rising drone of the motor in the laboratory reached my ears, then the vibrant humming of the generator. Paul had already reached the laboratory, and started the motor.

My heart thudding with swift alarm, though even then I did not realize the full horror of the impending catastrophe, I raced desperately across the room, and down the shining halls to the laboratory.

When I burst into the room, Paul had already put on the curious head-set, with the little black disks fitting against his shaven temples. He had just lit the banks of tubes; his fingers were still on the rheostat.

His movements seemed normal, rapid and efficient enough. But a single terrified glance at his face told me that he was asleep. Though his eyes were open, they had a curiously glazed, staring, lifeless look. His features were set in a dull, leaden mask.

Immediately I realized that I might be too late to stop him.

Already, without waking himself, he had gained full control of the amazing power of the integrator, which could change his mental images, the stuff of his dreams, into physical reality. I did not know just what to expect, though the presence of danger was evident enough.

Elaine was just inside the door, watching Paul with puzzled apprehension. I must try to give some idea of that last

glimpse of her full-blown beauty. In the clear light shining from rosy walls and emerald vault, she was gorgeous, breath-taking. Richly curving, erect, white-skinned, her fine body was almost bare. Her abundant hair fell in glistening waves, parted by the soft curves of her white, upturned breasts. Her full red lips were parted a little, and her limpid eyes were filled with anxious concern. Swiftly, her oval face was turned to me. Her clear voice spoke quickly.

"Oh, Verne, I'm glad you came! Paul is acting so strangely! He doesn't seem to be able to hear me——"

"He's asleep!" I whispered, urgently. "Go to him, and slip that thing off his head. Hurry! But don't startle him."

I thought that she could approach him more quietly than I could. I was afraid of what would happen if he were alarmed, while commanding the power of the integrator.

Elaine moved swiftly across the concrete floor.

Paul's lifeless, sleep-filled eyes were lifted toward her, now. I saw recognition dawning in them—and horror!

I remember that her bare feet made a soft, scratching shuffle upon the rough concrete. It must have been that sound. . . .

Running through a dark room, in his childhood, Paul once overturned a box of live tarantulas that had been shipped to our father. He had always been afraid of them, and the accident paralyzed him with fear. Unable to call for help, or run, he stood there among the things. He said afterward that he could hear their feet. They made *soft, scratching, shuffling sounds*. . . .

What happened is almost too hideous to write.

The odd sound of Elaine's feet, on the concrete, must have brought back all the circumstances of his great fright to Paul's sleeping mind. The sound precipitated the nightmare dream, that had its sinister roots in that fright. And the integrator *translated the nightmare into reality!*

I HEARD Paul scream. His cry was hoarse with insufferable agony of fear. It was choked off suddenly, into a strangling moan.

Paul struggled in the hideous clutches of nightmare. His whole body was trembling violently. Glittering beads of sweat burst out upon his grimacing, corpse-white face. He was gasping; little bubbling, squeaking sounds came from his lips, like the cries of a frightened animal.

His body was paralyzed by the recurrence of that awful fear that had been burned into his childish brain. . . . And the nightmare dream in his tortured mind was translated into unspeakable, soul-searing reality. . . .

Elaine, moving swiftly toward him, was suddenly stopped as if she had encountered an invisible stream of opposing force. Her fair white body was pushed back by some unseen energy. Even in her distress, the beauty of her made my heart ache.

She called out to me, her voice ringing clear in its desperate appeal.

"Verne, help me! Please! Something is—oh, Paul——"

Her clear, urgent call died in a dry and breathless gasp, as I leapt toward her.

Her body had been seized by the invisible projection rays of the machine. No longer was she a separate entity; she had become merely a magnified figment of Paul's nightmare dream. Her lovely form was suddenly enveloped in a luminous flux, so that I could not see it very plainly.

Then she changed. Oh, God, *she changed*. . . .

Paul had told me, many times, how

in his hideous dreams familiar persons were altered. . . .

Elaine became a spider!

Her fair body seemed to melt and flow in a shining vortex. It thickened, and swelled, and became dark. Her limbs grew long and black, with dreadful swiftness; additional ones were thrust out, like pseudopods. Limbs and body were covered suddenly with a rough black hair.

Her head sank, her white teeth became enormous and hideous fangs. Her limpid dark eyes grew scarlet, glowed insanely with implacable evil.

With the swiftness of a dream, the innocently lovely woman was transformed into a gigantic tarantula!

Having started to her aid, I recoiled from the incredible, monstrous thing she had become. I was paralyzed, for an instant, with an overwhelming, mind-blasting fear, akin to that of my brother.

Then, with the sudden return of desperate strength, I dashed to the accursed machine that had wrought such horror, wrenched a heavy condenser from its connections, and began smashing insanely with it the electron tubes and other delicate parts.

Like a madman, I was still hammering at the integrator when Paul screamed again, in ultimate horror.

He was awake, now.

But the gigantic spider had seized him in its hideous jaws.

Sunk in the depths of primal fear, he shrieked, babbled, implored me wildly to save him, and laughed . . . laughed. . . .

I was helpless. Even had there been a weapon available, I could not have broken the chains of stark horror that fettered me.

Physically sick, paralyzed with icy fear, I watched my brother, screaming and laughing in the jaws of the monstrous spider, until the great fangs closed with a sickening sound upon his head . . . and his shrieks came mercifully no more. . . .

12. The Lurking Horror

AT LAST the hideous beast moved away, still carrying Paul's limp body in its encrimsoned jaws. Regaining some measure of control over my shaking limbs, I ran totteringly from the room, and out of the shining castle into the swamp.

Behind me the pile glowed with weird and eldritch radiance against the moonless darkness. Scarlet-windowed walls of lucent green. Domes of gelid violet. Towers of dull black, of sullen gold.

I staggered on, breaking my way through rank undergrowth, tearing flesh and garments upon unseen briars, splashing through stagnant, scum-covered water, until the light of the accursed castle had vanished behind me, and the ground quaked under my feet.

Two days I hid in the swamp, without food or water that I dared to drink, suffering agony from hordes of mosquitoes that was but a trifle against the agony of my memory of that night of horror.

The castle and the hideous thing within it, I knew, would quickly disintegrate, when the machine failed to replace the energy they were constantly radiating. Knowing that Henri Dubois, the Cajun, would return on the third day, with the mail and supplies, I decided to venture as far as the landing, to intercept him.

I knew there was danger, though I hoped that the monstrous spider might already have met its fate.

The castle was breaking up, when I came in sight of it. Fantastic towers and domes were toppling, crashing, shattering into showers of colored sparks that vanished before they touched the ground. Purple lightning—the liberated electrical energy from the disintegrating space-frames—flickered in a lurid pall about

the crumbling walls, crackling and muttering.

The black central tower collapsed as I watched. It fell into a blaze of electric violet, above the ghostly, shining ruins of crenelated walls; and hollow thunder boomed upon my ears.

Only the bare concrete foundation, I knew, would remain in a few hours, with the dynamo and the wrecked apparatus upon it.

Hoping that the colossal spider had met its fate within the doomed building, and forgetful of the fatal fact that Paul had been forced to make denser and hence more enduring the fixations of energy in his living creations, I started down to the landing on the bayou, to wait for the Cajun's boat.

A crackling in the undergrowth beside the trail——

THUS, in the middle of a sentence, Verne Telfair's unfinished manuscript breaks off. At that point in his narrative he laid his pen aside, never to take it up again. For that night, the Cajun had told me, fever and delirium seized him, sweeping him swiftly to the lonely grave in the swamp.

It is not difficult, from what the Cajun told me, to outline the rest.

The monstrous spider, escaping disintegration longer than the castle, had left the falling building. Lurking in the undergrowth beside the trail, it attacked the unfortunate Verne as he came past.

It was already weakened, perhaps, by its incipient dissolution, and he was able to escape its clutches, though somewhat injured, and to reach the landing, where he found Henri Dubois with his skiff.

His death, five days later, from injuries that appeared relatively slight, must be laid to some poison introduced in his body during the encounter with the spider. We know nothing of the reactions of the human organism to the "matter" fixated by Paul Telfair's marvelous integrator. In Verne's case, however, we may well believe that the spider's venom acted as a specific poison.

I have notified police authorities and the relatives of the two brothers, of their death, though without revealing the full circumstances of the tragedy. And I have had the remains of my friends removed to their family vault in a New Orleans cemetery.

When I last saw it, the time-blackened dynamo and the corroded and shattered apparatus of the wand of doom, as it might be termed, remained undisturbed upon the crumbling concrete platform in the swamp, though half buried beneath the silt and debris left by flood waters. The swift growth of vegetation is overwhelming it, however, and within a few years the very site of Paul Telfair's audacious and tragic experiment will be lost for ever.

"He turned his head toward me. 'Get out!' he gasped. 'Quick!'"

The Dogs of Doctor Dwann

By EDMOND HAMILTON

An eery, blood-chilling story of weird surgery and the things that ran in the night and howled through the forest in the Adirondack hills

"SO YOU'VE taken the cottage up by Doctor Dwann's place?" said the elderly storekeeper as he wrapped my purchases. "Settling here or just a visitor?"

"Just a visitor for the summer," I told him. "My doctor ordered me up to these Adirondack hills for a rest."

"Well, it ain't my idea of a place for a rest," said the storekeeper emphatically,

"back up in the hills where your cottage is."

He looked about the little village store, empty except for ourselves, and then leaned closer, his gray-whiskered face wearing a sharp, intent expression.

"Did you hear any dogs barking up there last night?" he asked. "Any *queer* barking?"

"Why, I did hear some dogs barking off in the hills," I said. "I didn't notice anything queer about it."

"You will if you stay up there," he predicted. "People around Nottville here are talking about those dogs barking and about what one fellow says he saw back in the hills one night. People are saying that that Doctor Dwann and the other fellow, Bowman——"

"What are people saying about me and Bowman, Farliss?" broke in a voice behind me.

I turned quickly. Unheard by either Farliss, the storekeeper, or myself, a man had entered the little store. This Doctor Dwann, as he had announced himself, was a man of forty or more with a thick-set, powerful figure. He had black eyes and close-cropped black hair, his nose hooked and his mouth square and strong.

He was regarding Farliss and myself with a pleasant smile, though I thought I detected in it a hint of amusement at the storekeeper's discomfiture. For the latter had jumped at the sudden interruption and was now facing Doctor Dwann with a certain sullenness.

"What are they saying about me and Bowman?" Doctor Dwann repeated, and as Farliss made no answer, turned to me. "I hope Farliss hasn't been traducing us to our new neighbor. You *are* our new neighbor, aren't you, the Mr. Jameson who rented the Rand cottage?"

"I'm Walton Jameson, yes," I said, extending my hand. "Farliss was only telling me that he didn't think the hills back up there very suitable for a rest such as I'm taking."

"Why not, Farliss?" asked Dwann of the storekeeper. "As one of Nottville's chief merchants you should be praising the neighborhood's attractions rather than dispraising them."

"Just said I don't think those west hills are a good place for a rest, and I don't," Farliss said doggedly. He added pointedly, "You wanted to get something, doctor?"

"Meat, bread and other of the necessaries of animal existence," Doctor Dwann said, handing him a list. "Bowman was too busy to come down today and I had to do it."

As I nodded to him and started out the door he stopped me. "Don't go, Mr. Jameson. I'm driving back up to our place in a few minutes and as the road goes right past your cottage I can drop you off there."

I thanked him and waited. In a short time Farliss had ready Doctor Dwann's large packages of meat and smaller parcels of other foods.

Doctor Dwann placed them in the back of his touring-car and then, with the storekeeper looking after us from his door, we drove off down Nottville's single struggling street. At the end of the village Dwann turned west over the bridge across the narrow Reed River, and the car started its climb into the western hills.

THEY loomed before us, green range on range of forest-clad heights, each range out-topped by the one beyond. In the nearer hills we could see the compact white buildings of farms gleaming here and there in the morning sunshine, but farther westward only forest appeared to cover the slopes and crests.

Doctor Dwann gestured widely as he

drove up the steep and narrow dirt roads. "A fine region, Mr. Jameson. I hope Farliss hasn't spoiled your stay in it with his talk."

"No, he was just telling me of some queer barkings of dogs heard back in these hills, and that's hardly enough to make me leave," I said smiling.

Doctor Dwann's face, though, became suddenly serious, irritated. "So that's what Farliss was saying to you. And he was about to tell you, no doubt, that Bowman and I——"

He broke off. "But this is becoming ridiculous! If Farliss and the rest of the people around Nottville don't stop their silly talk I'll see that they're made to do so!"

"What's it all about?" I asked him perplexedly.

"It's a mess of rumors set going by these yokels who haven't intelligence enough to appreciate a rational explanation," Dwann said forcibly. "The sum of them is, Mr. Jameson, that I and my colleague, Doctor Bowman, are engaged in some sort of dark scientific horrors back in our place.

"You see, Bowman and I chose these hills for our zoological research station mainly because we'd have plenty of room and yet be more or less secluded from curiosity-seekers. We had our building put up back on one of these hills almost two years ago. Our work is research into animal intelligence, defining its factors, measuring its limits, testing capacity to learn, and the like. We've worked with dogs, police-dogs, as the most accessible and easily handled of animal subjects.

"Well, our experiments are perfectly comprehensible and normal, but the natives around here prefer to believe that we are engaged in some hideous kind of canine research—just because we won't let them ramble through our place at will! They've spread rumors of all kinds of strange dogs or dog-like beasts seen or heard around our place at night, and every stray dog that yelps back in these hills is set down as more evidence of our unholy activities."

"So that's what Farliss meant when he asked me if I'd heard any queer barking," I said, and Dwann nodded.

"Yes, since your cottage is on the hill next to our hill, and you'd be in a better position to hear what we were up to."

"It's all rather ridiculous," I admitted. "I hope it doesn't hamper your work any."

He shrugged. "Bowman and I pay little attention to them. But it is rather annoying to find them telling this nonsense to strangers down in Nottville.

"But here's your cottage," he added. "Our place is on the next hill, as I said. Perhaps you can glimpse it."

We had wound up through the steep hairpin turns of the dirt road to the forested hill-top where my little cottage perched.

Looking across the deep valley that separated me from the crest of the higher range of hills a mile or two westward, I could indeed make out the gray mass of a building surrounded by a high wall and half hidden amid the trees.

Doctor Dwann handed out my packages. "I'll be seeing you soon, Mr. Jameson," he said cordially. "Bowman and I are so busy we have no visitors, but I can stop in on my way to the village."

"Please do," I invited. "And I'll be glad to meet your colleague also."

Doctor Dwann drove off, his car moving down from my hill-crest into the next valley, then climbing the steep slope of the next hill. I went inside my cottage with the mental note that Dwann and Bowman might give me some intellectual contacts which I evidently could not expect

from the suspicious and rumor-ridden natives.

THE rumors Doctor Dwann had told me of recurred to my mind that night. I had finished the simple supper I had cooked for myself, and had retired to the porch of my little cottage to smoke and watch darkness dropping over the tumbled hills north and westward. Night's blackness was complete by the time I rose to go in.

Stopping to knock the ashes from my pipe, I heard suddenly through the night a sound that for a moment held me motionless. It was a dog's howl, a long barking cry that came from the hills northwestward and that was followed in a moment by several such cries, a prolonged barking chorus.

There was something in those barking outcries that held me on the porch in the darkness, listening. They were certainly the cries of dogs, swift yelping barks followed by long howls, yet there was something un-doglike about them—an unusual deepness of pitch and huskiness of tone. They made me remember at once what Farliss had told me of "queer" barking.

Then as the howls came again I told myself that I was letting Farliss' notions affect my hearing, and went inside. By the time I had lit my lamp and settled down beside it with my book, I had dismissed the barking from mind.

I had been reading for more than a half-hour, I think, when I was aroused from my absorption by a loud burst of the barking that seemed to come from close outside my cottage. As I looked up, a little startled, the howls were repeated. This time I could not doubt that there was something quite unusual in the deepness and huskiness of those canine outcries.

I rose from my chair, intending to go to the door and listen. But before I reached the door I stopped suddenly. Without warning other than a sound of quick-running feet outside, there had appeared suddenly at the window beside the door the heads of two great dogs who were looking in at me.

Their heads were very clear in the light of my lamp. Pointed brown muzzles as of large police-dogs they were, red tongues hanging from between their gleaming white teeth in a grin, their green-lit eyes staring directly in at me as I stood looking at them.

The thought foremost in my mind as I met the two dogs' gaze was that they must be dogs of very large size indeed, since the window was as high as my own head and I assumed that they were reared up against it outside. For perhaps two full minutes I stood without moving and met the gaze of the two dogs.

Then with an ejaculation I moved toward the window through which the two dog-faces looked. At once they vanished from sight and there was a sound of running feet outside and two husky howls. These were answered by two or three others and then with some little relief I heard the barking cries of all of the beasts receding southward.

I found to my surprize that I was trembling a little. The appearance of the two dogs' heads at my window had been so sudden, and there had been something so striking in their fixed gaze at me, that my nerves had been affected. I went to the door and looked out into the soft black night. From southward came the husky barking chorus.

My gaze, as I turned to re-enter the cottage, happened to strike the ground outside the window by the door. Suddenly I was tense, staring. The ground was illuminated by light that spilled through the window. It was black earth soft from

recent rains, bearing imprints like wax. But there were in it no imprints at all of the paws of the two police-dogs who a moment before had peered in at me!

Instead, newly made in the soft black earth and as plain to the sight as day, were the tracks of two pairs of *bare human feet!* These tracks came toward the window and departed, and the impressions at the window had their toes pointed toward it and were deeper sunken, for all the world *as though two men had been looking in my window a moment before instead of two dogs!*

I stared at the tracks dazedly, uncomprehending. I could see not a single dog-track on all the ground around my cottage, only the tracks of bare human feet. Then the full strangeness of the thing smote me. Dogs that left human tracks instead of canine ones! Dogs whose barking sounded strange and un-doglike! Were these, then, the dogs that the people of the region feared?

2

DOGS that left human tracks! For a space of time that must have measured minutes I stood outside my cottage, the light from its window alone dispelling the brooding darkness of night about me, and tried to explain to myself this astounding thing. What, indeed, could explain rationally this leaving of clear human footprints by dogs?

It came to me that I might have, in the uncertain light from the window, mistaken footprints of my own and missed seeing the ordinary paw-tracks of the dogs. With this thought in mind, I lit matches and bent to examine the soft ground around the cottage more closely.

The little flares of the matches disclosed even more clearly what I had already seen. There were no dog-tracks anywhere in the soft ground around the cottage. Instead there were, clear and unmistakable, the tracks of bare human feet. Thus they could not be my footprints or those of any one I knew, since neither I nor any one I knew of had been walking around the cottage with feet bare.

Two pairs of these bare feet, as I had already seen, had approached from the road and had left their impressions by the window. I followed their trail now away from the window and found that a hundred feet south of the cottage they were joined by two other similar sets of barefooted human footprints, all four trending southward.

And as I stared at these freshly made human footprints, by the light of my matches, I heard again from southward the long, husky howls of dogs. I stood listening until the match I held burned down to my fingers, making me drop it hastily.

I went back to the front of my cottage and stood in front of its lamplit window, listening. Soon there came again from the night-shrouded hills southward the barking chorus. This time, listening intently, I thought I could distinguish in it at least four different dogs' howling.

What could it all mean, I asked myself? Four or five dogs were abroad in the hills, that was plain, running and yelping as dogs will often do in forest country by night. They had neared my cottage and two of them had even reared at my window to look in at me. Then the two had gone on with the others, were still running in the wooded hills. All was clear except the one thing—why did these dogs leave human footprints?

Could it be the work of practical jokers? No, for the two dog-heads I had seen in my window had been real and living, heads of police-dogs with eyes green-lit and red tongues hanging from

between white teeth. And it would take more than a joke to set going the whispered rumors and fears that Farliss, the storekeeper down in Nottville, had told me were abroad in the section.

Farliss? I remembered abruptly that the whiskered storekeeper when he had told me about the queer barking heard back in the hills, and the queer stories going about, had been about to connect these things with Doctors Dwann and Bowman when he had been interrupted by Dwann's entrance. What had Farliss been about to tell me?

But now I remembered too that Doctor Dwann himself, during our ride up into the hills that morning from Nottville, had explained to me that because he and Bowman were engaged in zoological research on dog-intelligence, the natives of the region connected them with the queer dog-phenomena in the hills. Dwann, telling me this frankly, had apparently not believed for a moment that there was anything unusual going on.

But I now knew better. Certainly nothing could be more unusual than this leaving of human footprints by dogs. What would Dwann make of that, I wondered, when he knew? Suddenly I resolved to go, at once, and tell Dwann about it. He and Bowman might be able to explain, I thought, and so much had the astounding thing unsettled my thoughts that a rational explanation of it was my paramount and pressing need.

It would take but twenty minutes or so to walk over to Dwann's place on the next hill-top, I told myself. Staring in that direction, indeed, I could make out that next range of hills indistinctly in the starlight, though the valley that lay between me and it was shrouded in deep shadow.

I went into my cottage for my hat and stick, turned out my lamp, and came out again, closing my door. As I did so I heard again from southward the distant, husky baying of the dogs. The sound made me hesitate for a moment, but as it died away I grasped my stick more tightly and set off along the road.

The road was in the starlight a ribbon of misty white winding down over the wooded slope and through the dark forests of the valley up the next slope. In a moment I was swinging along down the slope. As I went downward I was able to see on the next hill's crest a spark of yellow light from Dwann's place. I walked steadily on.

It was a lonely walk, for the woods were dark and silent about me, only the hoot of an owl or cry of some other night-bird breaking the stillness. My footsteps rang unnaturally loud on the road. Then through the stillness came again from southward the deep, reverberating calls of the dog-pack.

Soon I reached the trough of the valley between the hills, and there it was very dark, for the starlight could not penetrate between the towering trees that loomed on either side of the road. I crossed the valley and started the steep climb up the next slope.

It was when I had been climbing this slope for a few minutes that the calls of the dog-pack came again, and this time more loudly. I did not believe at first that this was really the case, and stopped to listen. Standing in the starlit road, the dark woods silent on either side of me, I waited.

In a moment came the dog-cries again, deep and husky barking which I could not doubt this time was really louder and nearer. The dogs, it seemed, were circling back from the south into the valley behind and below me, and from their out-cries I judged that they were moving fast.

Something of a chill came over me as I heard that canine chorus louder and closer. I grasped my stick more tightly and quickened my pace. Yet the slope was so steep that even to climb it at normal speed was an effort, and to make much haste would be exhausting.

I was well up the slope, however, moving steadily up the winding road's turns. The howls of the dog-pack came now from the valley down behind me. I was just estimating that the dogs must be obliquely crossing the road down there, when there came up to me a sudden explosion of excited yelping cries. These changed quickly to long quavering howls that grew louder below me.

The dogs, having struck my track on the road, had changed direction and were coming after me up the road. Realization of that sank into me as I heard their howls several times in the next few minutes, each time coming from the road below me. And they were drawing closer.

The weirdness of the whole situation struck me and for the first time I felt fear. I knew that dogs that run thus in the country by night can often be dangerous animals, and in addition there clung to these particular dogs the mystery of the human tracks they had left outside my cottage—the mystery that was the reason for this journey of mine to Doctor Dwann's.

I moved more rapidly, counting on reaching Dwann's place before the dogs could come up to me.

Climbing the steep winding road thus with a haste that cost me much, I heard the dogs give tongue once or twice more, and then fall silent.

This made me think for a moment that they had given up the chase. Then it occurred to me that instead of following the road they might be cutting across its turns through the woods.

Hardly had this thought come to me when from somewhere in the woods to my right, a little behind me, came a loud howl. This startled me, not only from its nearness but because heard thus near the huskiness and deepness of the howl were very un-doglike.

Another howl came from the left, as though answering the first. At this evidence that the dogs were overtaking me and that some of them were running in the woods on either side of me, I broke into a run.

As I ran, panting for breath, I hoped each moment to reach the crest of the wooded hill and see Doctor Dwann's place before me. Now from either side and from close behind me also the barking howls came louder and exultant. The dogs were converging upon me and I could hear the crashing of their bodies in the woods on either side.

And as I ran on up the road I seemed to glimpse in the dark woods about me the darker shapes of figures nearing me, running obliquely along the road. But these shapes crashing through the brush did not seem dog-shapes as I glimpsed them, but erect human-shapes!

For a moment it flashed through my mind that these were men, who, for some reason, were hunting me with the dogs I had heard. But then occurred a thing that shattered this supposition and that seemed at the same moment to shatter my powers of thought. From these dark figures in the woods—*these human figures*—came the husky dog-howls I had been hearing!

The horror of that crashed through my brain even as I stumbled instinctively on up the road. Dogs that trailed me and that howled their hunting-cries but seemed to have human shapes! Yes, and dogs that had left human footprints!

With a choking cry of horror I threw myself forward. I had reached the hill's crest and before me the woods gave way to a small clearing in which stood a wall-encircled gray building whose windows gleamed with yellow light. But as I staggered across the clearing toward the closed gate in the wall, I heard the dog-things crash from the woods behind and with loud howls spring across the clearing after me.

Before I could reach the gate their running feet were close behind me and their sound was not that of swift-pattering dog-feet but the heavier tread of human feet! They were directly behind me, overtaking me, and as I saw that they would be on me before I reached the gate, I spun around with a cry, my stick raised.

For a moment I stood frozen, incapable of movement. The dog-things, four in number, were in fact but a few yards from me, and in the starlight that dimly illuminated the clearing I could see them plainly. That moment I stared, and then as the things leapt at me I screamed, and still screaming struck among them.

The four things were not dogs and neither were they men. They had the bodies of men, white and unclothed bodies. But on their shoulders were the heads of dogs! Pointed police-dog heads, with blazing eyes, white fangs and dark muzzles! Man bodies and dog-heads!

They were rushing at me, running upright like men but with dog-howls coming from the grinning jaws of their dog-heads! They did not raise their hands, but snapped at me with their teeth! I struck among them with my stick, madly, insensately.

They gave back a little, snarling, and then made to rush at me again. But I had thrown myself against the gate in the wall, was beating crazily upon it.

"Dwann, let me in!" I screamed. "Dwann, for God's sake let me in!"

THERE were exclamations from inside the wall and then the gate swung inward. Doctor Dwann and a stocky younger man I guessed to be his colleague Bowman stood in its opening, framed against the yellow light from the building inside. As I fell in against them I could not in my horror attain speech but gestured toward the four human-bodied dog-things behind me who again, with snapping snarls, were rushing at me.

I heard Doctor Dwann exclaim something and then, as he supported me, I saw Bowman run out to the four dog-things and utter a sharp command to them. At once their fierceness ebbed and they cringed and cowered around Bowman. I think that was the final touch to my horror, the sight of Bowman treating those dog-headed but human-bodied things as though they were ordinary dogs. I felt my senses leaving me.

I was aware that Dwann and Bowman were helping me inside the wall and into the building, into a yellow-lit room.

Voices were in my ears, Dwann's deep one and Bowman's sharper tones. I heard low barking outside. Then something fiery was poured down my throat.

My vision cleared. I sat in a comfortably furnished living-room, and Doctors Dwann and Bowman were bending over me, the former with a glass in his hand.

From outside came again one or two of the low, husky barks. I remembered everything when I heard that, and clutched Dwann's wrist.

"Dwann!" I cried. "What are those things? Those men with the heads of——" My voice failed me.

"Those things that chased you?" Dwann asked. He seemed intensely irritated, vexed. "Damn it, Jameson, why

must you come walking this way at night and blunder into things that don't concern you?"

"It wasn't altogether his fault, I think," said Bowman to Dwann in a calmer tone. "They were tracking him, apparently."

"I want to know what they are!" I cried, my voice rising to a ragged scream. "You know—you saw them—dog-heads on the bodies of men! Dog-heads, yes, on human bodies, barking and chasing me!

"And over at my cottage tonight! They looked in at my window and I, who saw only their dog-heads at the window, could not understand how they had left human footprints outside the window! I never dreamed of them being dog-heads on human bodies, and came over to tell you about the thing. Dwann, what are those unholy things?"

Dwann looked at Bowman, then at me. "They are just what you call them," he said. "Dog-heads on the bodies of men."

"But what made them?" I exclaimed. "What produced monsters like that?"

A sudden thought struck me with deeper horror and I looked wildly at Dwann and Bowman. "Dwann, it was you two! You said you were experimenting with dogs up here, and they said down in the village you were connected somehow with the queer dogs heard in the hills!

"You two made those monsters!" I was on my feet, shaking. "You made them and I saw you controlling them just now, commanding them! How—why—in God's name, did you do it?"

Dwann handed me the glass again. "Drink the rest of this," he said. I did, and the fiery liquid steadied me a little. "We'll have to tell him," Dwann said then, speaking to Bowman.

"If you do it'll be out," Bowman said levelly, his eyes holding the other's.

"Perhaps not," Dwann said. "Anyway, he has blundered onto it now. If you'd just kept away from here at night, Jameson!" he said with that irritation again.

He sat down in a chair beside me. "Jameson, you've projected yourself into something that Bowman and I have tried to keep secret," he said. "I'm going to explain it to you in the hope that when you understand you'll not disclose what you've learned."

"Tell me first," I said shakily, "what those dog-headed things were. I think I must be a little insane."

"You're not insane — they're real enough," Dwann said. He nodded to Bowman. "Bring them in, Stuart."

Before I could protest Bowman went out. I heard welcoming barks outside the house. In a moment he re-entered the room and with him came the four—things.

If the four had been horrible in the dim starlight, they were more so in the prosaic electric light of the living-room. Sick at heart, trembling violently, I gazed at them.

There bodies were the naked white bodies of full-grown men. One body was taller and better muscled, younger-looking, than the others. All four bodies were scratched in many places as though by briars and brush in the woods. All four stood quite erect and their arms hung loosely, unused, at their sides.

Upon these four human bodies, just above the shoulders, the white human flesh of the lower neck merged suddenly into the hairy flesh of a dog's neck. The whole upper-necks, therefore, were dog-necks and had been fitted onto the human shoulders so that the dog's long pointed head was normally horizontal, eyes and muzzles pointed straight forward.

The heads were as I had seen two of them in my window, large police-dog heads. They breathed, their dog-mouths open in a grin with white fangs showing, tongues hanging out a little, and down in their human chests their human lungs were drawing in their breath! The four things, clustered around Bowman, nudged him with their human bodies as dogs will a master, looking about them with quick bright canine eyes.

They saw me and all four of the dog-men growled, husky, deep growls coming strangely from the combination of human lungs and canine larynx, and they all moved toward me with fangs bared.

"Quiet!" snapped Bowman to them. They quieted at once, nudging Bowman ingratiatingly again. A sickness shook me as I saw.

"Here!" Doctor Dwann ordered, extending his hand.

The four dog-men trotted across the room to us. Their human bodies moved in short, shambling steps, their movements seeming not wholly co-ordinated. They rubbed against Doctor Dwann in turn.

"Speak!" Dwann ordered.

The dog-men opened their mouths and howled loudly.

"Play dead!" commanded Dwann, and then the four slumped to the floor and lay motionless on their backs.

"Paw!" ordered Dwann.

They sprang up and each extended an arm awkwardly as though offering a paw.

"Dwann, I can't stand this!" I said chokingly. "For God's sake don't——"

"All right—call them, Stuart," Dwann said, and at Bowman's command the four dog-men shambled back across the room, lay down in a corner. Bowman came over to Dwann and me then.

"Well, Jameson," said Doctor Dwann to me grimly, "do you still doubt whether the dog-men are real?"

"They're real enough," I said thickly. "But Dwann, what—how——"

"I'll explain what and how," Dwann said calmly. He sat back in his chair. "Jameson, did you ever hear of the experiments made in Moscow a few years ago by Brukhanenko and Chechulin with dog-heads?"

I shook my head. "Well, Brukhanenko and Chechulin were Russian biologists who conceived the idea that the head of a large animal like a dog might be kept living apart from its body. They succeeded in severing a dog's head completely from its body and keeping it living for some hours.

"They accomplished this by providing an artificial circulatory system which kept up the circulation of prepared blood inside the dog's head, an artificial heart pumping the blood at a regular rate. The dog's head lived, could open and close its eyes and to some extent see, could bark or try to bark, and could even swallow food. These experiments made the names of Doctors S. S. Brukhanenko and S. I. Chechulin famous among biologists.

"Bowman and I," Doctor Dwann's eyes were kindling, "Bowman and I were at that time research zoologists in the Malcolm Foundation down at New York. We became interested in the Brukhanenko-Chechulin work and determined to go further with it. After some preliminary repetitions of the Russian experiments, we resolved to carry the work even further and transfer the head of one living animal to the body of another!

"We suggested this line of research to Doctor Ranley Jackson, head of our department at the Malcolm Foundation, asking his permission to go on with it. We pointed out what far-reaching biological and surgical implications such successful

experiments would involve. But Jackson, damn him"—Dwann's eyes clouded with hate—"Jackson told us that the thing was too horrible and that he could never allow such research to be carried out in his department.

"But Bowman and I were so determined to go on with it that we decided to do so secretly. We did that, working under cover at the Foundation. But three of our fellow-workers in the department, Willetts and Baletti and Smith, found out what we were doing. They reported us at once to Doctor Jackson, and immediately Jackson had us ousted from the Foundation."

Doctor Dwann's face held bitter feeling at the memory, and I could see that in Bowman's stolid features too was hate.

"Jackson, with the aid and assistance of Willetts and Smith and Baletti, had us ousted without appeal. It didn't matter to them that Bowman and I were doing a work that might mean the opening up of a whole new line of zoological research; it didn't mean anything that it might revolutionize some of modern zoological science. All they could see in it was the horror that shocked their little minds.

"But Bowman and I wouldn't give the thing up. We resolved to go ahead and show Jackson and Willetts and the rest what we could achieve. We pooled our money and came up to this isolated hill region to establish our research station. Back here on this hill-top we had this building erected, with room for our laboratories and living-quarters, and a wall around it for further seclusion. Then we imported a dozen large police-dogs to start with and commenced work.

"Since then, for almost two years, Bowman and I have worked here. We tried first to transfer the head of one dog to the body of another, and keep it living. We failed; for we found that though we could keep dog-heads living by themselves, by means of an artificial heart and blood-stream, to join them to the living bodies of others and knit the several blood-vessels and vertebræ and tie the different nerves and fuse skin and tissues again, was beyond our powers.

"But we kept at it, having more and more police-dogs sent in. Gradually Bowman and I came to have greater and greater skill at the work, conquering our difficulties one by one. We developed a whole new technique to facilitate growing of one blood-vessel to another. We devised bone-building solutions to hasten the knitting of vertebræ. The nerves gave us most trouble, for unless we connected them correctly the head had no control over the body. But even that we conquered.

"We reached a point where we could perform the thing almost flawlessly, could sever the heads of two dogs and then interchange them, putting each head back onto the other's body instead of its own. So that the work we had meant to show Jackson and the rest we could do, we had succeeded in doing! We could transfer dog-heads from one dog-body to another at will!

"But by then Bowman and I had new objectives. We had debated whether or not it would be possible to put the heads of dogs onto the bodies of animals of entirely different species, and still keep them living. Instead of stopping work, therefore, we decided to go on and see whether such a transfer as that would be possible.

"We decided to try placing dog-heads on the bodies of men. This choice was dictated not only by a sort of curiosity as to whether it would be possible, but also by the fact that if it were possible it would have a great effect in the field of surgery, leading perhaps to the placing of human heads on other bodies. But

obviously we could not use human bodies for subjects as we had been using our police-dogs.

"Since Bowman and I had decided that if we placed a living dog-head on a newly dead but undamaged human body, both head and body would live, that gave us a way to secure human bodies for subjects. We prepared all things and then Bowman went down to the city. He waited until an accident brought into a hospital a man who had just died of a head injury, his body being undamaged. No one claimed his body and Bowman secured it, packed it carefully, and rushed it up here.

"Once it was here we worked swiftly. We removed the damaged human head, then swiftly took the living head from one of our police-dogs and placed it on the human trunk. All our skill we used to knit its canine blood-vessels and vertebræ and nerves to the human ones, having made allowance beforehand for the differences between them, and also having made allowance chemically for the difference between human and canine blood. Then with the dog's head attached to the human body, we waited to see if it would live.

"It lived! When the anesthetic wore off, the dog's head still lived and re-animated the human body! And as time passed and the healing processes advanced, this dog-man, as we called him, was able more and more to move his human body and limbs. He moved them clumsily at first, due to the difference in head and body nerves, but quickly by aid of the reflex centers in his human body's spinal cord was able to walk and move as erectly as though wholly a man.

"But he was a dog still in mind! His dog-head, with its dog-brain, still held its canine intelligence even though it controlled now a human body. He was a dog with a human body! He barked, the dog-larynx in his neck retained, but his human lungs making his bark deeper and huskier. He obeyed all our commands as before, but now ran about with human body erect. A dog-man, a dog-head and mind with human body!

"We kept him here, and in the next months Bowman and I made more like him, three dog-men whose human bodies we procured from the city as we had the first. These four dog-men we kept inside here by day, but since they were in mind dogs still and must have exercise, we let them run outside at night. They always come back before morning, as any dog would. For though dog-men now, in mind and actions they are as much dogs as ever they were!"

4

DWANN looked calmly at me as he stopped. Bowman's eyes were on me also, but instead of the two men I was looking at the four dog-men in the room's corner. They were lying dozing, their human bodies sprawled carelessly and their dog-heads flat on the floor.

"Dwann," I said sickly, "your Doctor Jackson was right when he forbade your experiments. These monsters you've made—grotesque—terrible——"

"That attitude is to be expected on your part, Jameson," Doctor Dwann said, "but is it reasonable? Think, Jameson," he said forcefully, "there has never yet been a major advance in biological science that did not seem at first to the uninitiated unnatural and unholy. Yet this advance is as great as any ever made, as we tried to show to Jackson and to Willetts and Smith and Baletti."

"But is it an advance at all?" I asked. "Dwann, what possible good can it do to make creatures like these?"

Dwann waved his hand impatiently. "These creatures are not the object of our

experiments! They're only a sort of by-product—our real object as in any scientific experiment was the disclosure of new truths, the attainment of new technique that could be used for practical purposes."

"You wouldn't think it terrible," Bowman told me, "if a dog's glands or liver, for instance, were transferred into a human body. Why should it be terrible when a dog's head is used instead?"

"Bowman's right," Dwann said. "The difference is only in degree. That is what Jackson and the rest could not see."

I looked numbly from Bowman and from him to the dog-men again. Their very presence in the room dominated all my thinking with unreasoning horror, and I could not take my fascinated eyes long from them. I stared at the line on their necks where white human flesh ended and hairy dog-flesh began.

One of the things woke and stretched as I stared, extending his human arms as though they were paws, his dog-mouth yawning and showing its white canine teeth. His arm in stretching touched the dog-man nearest him, and the other woke and snapped crossly at him with sudden gleam of white dog-teeth.

"Dwann, where will this horror end?" I asked. "How many more things like that will you make?"

"No more," Dwann said. "Bowman and I have accomplished almost all we can expect to along this line, though we'd still like to test some other methods. But we don't want to have to leave here before we are completely through, and that is why we've kept it all secret and why I'm asking you to continue to keep it secret.

"You, Jameson, are an intelligent man, and even though you are horrified by this thing you can appreciate what value it may some day have for science. But the natives about here would simply see the horror of it and would destroy this place."

"I won't say anything," I said unsteadily. "In fact, I'm not even going to stay in this region another day, Dwann."

"That would perhaps be best," Doctor Dwann said, "though of course I leave that to you."

"And to think," I said weakly, "that I came up here to give my nerves a rest!"

We had risen, and now the dog-men too were rising. They came shuffling toward us, their dog-heads on a level with my own, carried as they were by the erect human bodies.

Wary of Dwann and Bowman beside me, yet they thrust their muzzles near my own head, sniffing at me as dogs will at a person, their green-lit eyes very close to my own. From them came again deep growls.

"Back!" Bowman said sharply, and the dog-men shuffled hastily back.

"They'll not bother you, Jameson," Dwann said. "Pay no attention to them."

But I had sunk weakly into a chair, without strength to stand, so shaken in body and mind was I by what I had seen this night.

Dwann looked sharply at me. "Jameson, you'll never make it back to your cottage in your present condition," he said. "You'd better stay here for the night."

Bowman nodded agreement. "If anything happened to you there'd be an investigation, which Dwann and I don't want."

"Stay here?" I said. "With those—things?"

"They'll be locked up tightly, don't worry, and won't bother you. And there's an extra bedroom for you."

I hesitated. The horror of the homeward walk through the darkness of the hills loomed even greater in my mind than my horror of the four dog-men before me. "I'll stay," I said unsteadily,

"if you're sure these things will be locked up."

"You can come and see us lock them up now," Doctor Dwann said. "Bring them along, Bowman."

He led me from the living-room into a hall of some length that ran back into the oblong building. There were seven or eight doors along it, on either side. Bowman followed Dwann and me, whistling the four dog-men after us. I heard their bare feet thudding on the floor.

Bowman opened one of the doors and disclosed a small kennel-like room hardly wider than the door. He ordered one of the dog-men into it and the thing walked reluctantly inside, curled up its human body on a mat in the corner. Bowman closed and locked the door.

"We put them in separate cells like this," Doctor Dwann explained, "so that they won't get to fighting among themselves and ruin our specimens."

Bowman ordered the other three dog-men into the next three little cells, and I felt relief as he locked their doors.

"So there you are," Dwann said. "You needn't fear the dog-men disturbing your sleep."

"What's in the other cells?" I asked, pointing to the remaining doors along the hall.

For answer Dwann opened one and I saw inside it a large police-dog—not one of the monstrous dog-men with human bodies, but a normal dog.

"Dogs we use for subjects we keep in some of the cells," Doctor Dwann explained. "The others are empty."

I went with Bowman and him on down the hall and around a turn at its end. Dwann opened a door to show me a large white-tiled laboratory elaborately fitted with mechanisms and instruments of metal and glass. Then he went back to another door which when opened disclosed a small but neat bedroom.

"Bowman and I have the rooms just across the hall," he told me, "so you'll be all right here. Just forget our scientific horrors and go to sleep."

"I'll try," I said. With that he and Bowman left me and closed the door.

Once in bed, I lay awake in the darkness for a long time, my thoughts chaotic. The horror of what I had experienced still shook my mind.

Dwann and Bowman had explained their work well enough and I could see that, as they said, their work, however horrible, might mean a tremendous advance in scientific knowledge. But no reasoning of this kind could overcome the horror I still felt of the dog-men. I could not see how even Dwann and Bowman could be insensible to that horror.

Dog-men—dog-heads on human bodies—dog-brains animating the bodies of men. Could any advance in scientific knowledge justify the creation of such monsters as this, who had peered in at my window and who had trailed and pursued me in the darkness?

At the thought that I lay under the same roof with the creatures, I shuddered. Yet they were, in fact, but dogs—no more to be feared than any dogs. Yet I did fear them, deeply, terribly. I listened as I lay there for any sound that might betray their presence, but there was none. Dwann and Bowman retired—I heard their doors closing.

Gradually I drifted into a troubled sleep, half waking each time remembrance of that horror roused my brain. I slipped more deeply back into sleep each time, though. So deeply I sank into darkness that soon I did not even half wake, sleeping completely. Then suddenly with a

jerk I found myself sitting bolt upright in the darkness, trembling violently.

I had been dreaming of an uncouth-headed monster creeping toward me with soft shuffling sound. And now even as I told myself that it was but my dream, I became aware that from across the room there was coming to my ear just such a soft sound. The door of my room was slowly opening.

In a fixed terror I sat there, incapable of movement, as the door slowly opened. The only light in the room was a small square of moonlight on the floor, that slanted in from the window. Yet I was aware by the sound that the door was opening and was aware a moment later that some one, something, was entering the room.

I sat unable to move or to utter a sound. Dwann and Bowman had locked up the dog-men. Yet I felt, from the soft sounds I heard, that it was no human who was entering the room. I could hear the sound of light, stealthy feet crossing the room toward me. Then as I gathered my numbed strength to act, the form in the darkness, or part of it, moved into the square of moonlight on the floor.

It was a man's head that moved into the square of light. The head was but a few feet above the floor, so that, although his body was hidden in the darkness, I judged this man must be crawling on hands and knees. He was looking up at me and I saw that his head was an elderly one, gray-haired, his eyes tense and his face unshaven.

He saw me in the darkness as I sat there staring down at him. His lips moved.

"Quiet!" he whispered. His voice was low, feeble, sibilant. "For God's sake don't make a sound!"

"Who are you?" I whispered, the spell broken. "What's the matter?"

"You're the man who came here tonight with the dog-men after you?" he said tensely. "The man Dwann and Bowman were talking to?"

I nodded with an effort. "Walton Jameson. But who are you?"

"I'm Jackson—Doctor Ranley Jackson," he said.

"Jackson?" My mind was searching my memory for the connotations that name aroused. "Jackson? The Doctor Jackson who Dwann and Bowman said was their superior at the Malcolm Foundation?"

"Yes!" he whispered. "Jameson, Dwann and Bowman have all four of us here — Willetts and Baletti and Smith and I!"

"But Dwann and Bowman said they hated you for obstructing their work," I whispered bewilderedly. "All four of you."

"They do hate us," Jackson said. "They got us up here by a ruse months ago, asking us to come up and see their new work. And they've kept us here ever since! You've got to help us!"

My mind was still hardly working but I slipped out of bed and into my clothes.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

Jackson had stayed where he was, his head in the moonlight but his body back in the darkness.

"I want you to help me get Smith and Baletti and Willetts out!" he whispered. "They're locked in separate cells like those of the dog-men. I found a key Bowman dropped yesterday in my cell and got out with it after working a long time—you can use it to let the others out quickly!"

"Why didn't you let them out yourself?" I asked. "If you have the key——"

For answer Jackson bent his head to the floor and with his mouth picked up a key which I now saw he had dropped there when he first spoke to me.

"I have to use the key like this—with

my mouth!" he said. "It would take too long, but you can do it quickly."

"But why not use your hands to do it?" I asked bewilderedly.

Jackson's gray face was ghastly. "This is why," he said. "This is what Dwann and Bowman have made of Baletti and Willetts and Smith and me."

He moved forward, so that his body as well as his head was in the revealing square of moonlight. I stared down at him, at first thinking my eyes deceived me, then shaken by a horror ten times greater than that which the dog-men had inspired in me.

For the head of Jackson was not set on any human body but on the hairy body of a large dog! The neck was set on the dog's shoulders so that the human head was upright. This was a reversal of the dog-men. Jackson and the other three were man-dogs, human heads upon dog-bodies!

I stared at Jackson's ghastly face and dog-body as he stood before me, and then as I thought of the others, of Smith and Willetts and Baletti—human heads on dog-bodies also, human minds ruling canine forms—my horror found voice in scream after choking scream.

5

OF WHAT followed immediately I have now only a horror-clouded and misty memory. I know that as I screamed there were sounds from elsewhere in the building, running feet and quick voices. Then as Jackson turned desperately, lights flashed on in the hall and Bowman appeared in the doorway of my room, his face crimson and a pistol in his hand.

Jackson leapt at him, his canine body and human head hurtling across the room toward Bowman like a brown thunderbolt. But before he reached Bowman the other had fired twice and Jackson fell to the floor and lay with canine body prone, stirring slightly.

Dwann burst into the room, black eyes sweeping the scene and his face forbidding. With a quick glance he took in the scene from the man-dog lying on the floor to me standing petrified with horror.

"Quick, secure him!" Dwann snapped to Bowman. "He mustn't get away now!"

Before I could recover enough to resist they had seized me and in a moment had bound my hands.

"Stay here with him," Dwann ordered Bowman. "I'll see if any of the rest have escaped."

He went out and down the hall, pistol in hand. In a moment he returned. "Smith and Willetts and Baletti are safe —Jackson was the only one to escape."

"What about Jameson?" Bowman asked, his own pistol still covering me.

Dwann's black eyes were hard as jet. "We'll take him into the laboratory," he said. "Keep him covered."

Holding to me, their pistols against me, they half lifted me out of the room into the hall. As I looked back numbly I saw Jackson's human-headed dog-body moving again, crawling across the floor to where lay the key he had dropped. But Dwann and Bowman, not seeing, were thrusting me into the laboratory.

Dwann snapped on lights, closed shutters, as calmly as though nothing unusual had happened. He came back then to where Bowman held me. His face was utterly calm, merciless.

"Jameson, you've discovered our secret and know that we've made not only dog-men but man-dogs," he said. "You know the truth now, that it wasn't dead human bodies we used in our experiments but living ones, the bodies of the four who did most to obstruct our work, Jackson and Willetts and the other two.

"We put living dog-heads upon their living bodies, and put their heads on living dog-bodies. If you had thought you'd have seen that we had to have living human bodies and not dead ones. What humans were we to use? Why should we use innocent people who had done us no harm, when those four had done us much harm and done the cause of scientific knowledge much harm also? So we got the four of them up here; drugged them and made man-dogs of them and dog-men of four of our dogs, by interchanging their heads and bodies.

"We did so in the cause of scientific knowledge." There was a ring of sincerity in Dwann's voice. "We know, Bowman and I, that the world would condemn us as monsters ourselves to have made such monsters, but we are willing to incur not only the world's condemnation but the condemnation of ourselves, even, to further our work."

"But, Dwann, what about me?" I asked hoarsely. "I want to go—for God's sake let me out of here!"

"Jameson, we can't let you go," Dwann said. "You know all we've done here and you'll surely tell it if we let you free. When you saw only the dog-men you would have kept silent and we were willing to let you go, but now we dare not."

"But what are you going to do with me then?" I cried. "Kill me?"

There was a strange regard, a pity almost, in Dwann's fathomless black eyes. "Jameson," he said, "Bowman and I have wanted to make one more transference of dog and human heads to test some methods we've devised since our last transferences. We're not going to kill you but we're going to test those methods on you."

"You're going to put my head on a dog's body like Jackson and the rest?—a dog's head on my body?—no!" I screamed. "No, you can't, you daren't!"

I struggled, struck with my bound hands, but Bowman held me helpless.

"Jameson, believe that I'm sorry for you," said Dwann. "I know that in doing this Bowman and I are acting the part of fiends, but fiends or not, we're going on with our work until it's complete to the last iota."

"But you daren't!" I cried again. "They'll discover what you've done here—you'll be torn to pieces for this——"

Dwann stepped to the laboratory wall and opened a small steel door in it. Inside I saw a plunger-switch.

"They'll never discover what's gone on here," Dwann told me. "This switch connects with a half-ton of dynamite under this building. When Bowman and I finish our work here we'll push this time-switch and in three minutes this place, and all the dog-men and men-dogs in it, will be destroyed. Before we do that, we'll finish our work. You're part of that work now, Jameson. And to save you the tortures of anticipation we're going to go ahead with our work on you now."

DAZED, unable to resist, I felt myself lifted to the smooth surface of an operating-table, one of two standing side by side. I was bound tightly to it by Dwann, while Bowman wheeled huge and complicated mechanisms to the two tables, intricate pumps connecting with rubber tubing, flat containers of thick solutions, mechanical and chemical revivification apparatus.

"All ready, Bowman—get one of the dogs," Dwann ordered. "The one from cell 4."

"Dwann, for the love of God——" I choked, as Bowman went to the laboratory door.

But before Bowman reached the door it was thrust open from the hall outside. Dwann and Bowman cried out.

In the door, bleeding from his two bullet-wounds and scarce able to stand, staggered the awful figure of the man-dog Jackson, the dog-body that bore Jackson's head!

Behind him were three other dog-bodied shapes with human heads! Three other man-dogs! Willetts and Baletti and Smith! Jackson had summoned enough strength to free them and now they looked into the laboratory at Dwann and Bowman with eyes blazing, terrible.

Dwann tried to get out the pistol in his pocket, but the three man-dogs had sprung. Jackson had sunk to the floor, but Willetts and Baletti and Smith, human heads on canine bodies, knocked Dwann and Bowman down by the sheer weight of their spring, and then were tearing at them with their sharp dog-claws, seeking with human teeth their throats.

Helpless on the operating-table I heard the terrible struggle, the cries of Dwann and Bowman, the sibilant, beast-like snarls of Willetts and the other two man-dogs. Dwann was down with the man-dog Baletti at his throat, Bowman fighting to escape the other two and get to his feet, striking madly at the man-dogs.

Then with a gurgling sigh Bowman collapsed across the limp body of the man-dog Smith. He had strangled Smith but his own throat was torn out. Dwann lay dead a little distance from him with his own throat crimson. Jackson lay still at the door and Baletti was walking dazedly about the room, but the man-dog Willetts stumbled across the room toward me.

He reared beside me, his sharp claws tearing at my bonds. I felt myself free, and staggered from the table to the laboratory floor. Willetts, staggering with me across the laboratory, was a terrible sight with his dog-body torn and bloody and his human face white and awful. He reared up against the wall by the door, toward the little steel door in the wall.

He turned his human head toward me. "Get—out!" he whispered gaspingly. "Quick——"

"But you? — the others?" I cried weakly.

For answer his paw ripped open the little steel door, grasped the plunger of the dynamite time-switch inside, pushed it down.

"Get—out—get—out——"

With mind rapidly crumbling from the repeated horrors to which it had been subjected, I stumbled out of the laboratory, down the hall, out of the house and through the gate in the wall, into the darkness.

Half-way across the clearing outside I stumbled and then felt my legs giving under me. But at that moment a terrific explosion split the night behind me, cleaving the darkness with a sword of fire as man-dogs and dog-men and those who had made them were swept by flaming destruction. Then came the duller crash of the building's encircling wall as it fell inward. And even at that moment I too fell, onto the friendly earth, clutching with unfeeling hands at the cold and dew-wet grass.

"Cowering against the wall of the courtyard, they watched the remarkable actions of the head."

The Testament of Athammaus

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

The state executioner's story of an incredible monstrosity that struck terror to an entire city

IT HAS become needful for me, who am no wielder of the stylus of bronze or the pen of calamus, and whose only proper tool is the long, double-handed sword, to indite this account of the curious and lamentable happenings which foreran the universal desertion of Commoriom by its king and its people. This I am well fitted to do, for I played a signal part in these happenings; and I left the city only when all the others had gone.

Now Commoriom, as every one knows, was aforetime the resplendent, high-built capital, and the marble and granite crown of all Hyperborea. But concerning the cause of its abandonment there are now so many warring legends and so many tales of a false and fabulous character, that I, who am old in years and triply old in honors, I, who have grown weary with no less than eleven lustrums of public service, am compelled to write this record of the truth ere it fade utterly

from the tongues and memories of men. And this I do, though the telling thereof will include a confession of my one defeat, my one failure in the dutiful administration of a committed task.

For those who will read the narrative in future years, and haply in future lands, I shall now introduce myself. I am Athammaus, the chief headsman of Uzuldaroum, who held formerly the same office in Commoriom. My father, Manghai Thal, was headsman before me; and the sires of my father, even to the mythic generations of the primal kings, have wielded the great copper sword of justice on the block of *eighon*-wood.

Forgive an aged man if he seem to dwell, as is the habit of the old, among the youthful recollections that have gathered to themselves the kingly purple of removed horizons and the strange glory that illumines irretrievable things. Lo! I am made young again when I recall Commoriom, when in this gray city of the sunken years I behold in retrospect her walls that looked mountainously down upon the jungle, and the alabastrine multitude of her heaven-fretting spires. Opulent among cities, and superb and magisterial, and paramount over all was Commoriom, to whom tribute was given from the shores of the Atlantean sea to that sea in which is the immense continent of Mu; to whom the traders came from utmost Thulan that is walled on the north with unknown ice, and from the southern realm of Tscho Vulpanomi which ends in a lake of boiling asphaltum. Ah! proud and lordly was Commoriom, and her humblest dwellings were more than the palaces of other cities. And it was not, as men fable nowadays, because of that maundering prophecy once uttered by the white sybil from the isle of snow which is named Polarion, that her splendor and spaciousness were delivered over to the spotted vines of the jungle and the spotted snakes. Nay, it was because of a direr thing than this, and a tangible horror against which the law of kings, the wisdom of hierophants and the sharpness of swords were alike impotent. Ah! not lightly was she overcome, not easily were her defenders driven forth. And though others forget, or haply deem her no more than a vain and dubitable tale, I shall never cease to lament Commoriom.

My sinews have dwindled grievously now; and Time has drunken stealthily from my veins; and has touched my hair with the ashes of suns extinct. But in the days whereof I tell, there was no braver and more stalwart headsman than I in the whole of Hyperborea; and my name was a red menace, a loudly spoken warning to the evil-doers of the forest and the town, and the savage robbers of uncouth outland tribes. Wearing the blood-bright purple of my office, I stood each morning in the public square where all might attend and behold, and performed for the edification of all men my allotted task. And each day the tough, golden-ruddy copper of the huge crescent blade was darkened not once but many times with a rich and wine-like sanguine. And because of my never-faltering arm, my infallible eye, and the clean blow which there was never any necessity to repeat, I was much honored by the King Loquamethros and by the populace of Commoriom.

I REMEMBER well, on account of their more than unique atrocity, the earliest rumors that came to me in my active life regarding the outlaw Knygathin Zhaum. This person belonged to an obscure and highly unpleasant people called the Voormis, who dwelt in the black Eiglophian Mountains at a full day's journey from Commoriom, and inhabited according to

their tribal custom the caves of ferine animals less savage than themselves, which they had slain or otherwise dispossessed. They were generally looked upon as more beast-like than human, because of their excessive hairiness and the vile, ungodly rites and usages to which they were addicted. It was mainly from among these beings that the notorious Knygathin Zhaum had recruited his formidable band, who were terrorizing the hills subjacent to the Eiglophian Mountains with daily deeds of the most infamous and iniquitous rapine. Wholesale robbery was the least of their crimes; and mere anthropophagism was far from being the worst.

It will readily be seen, from this, that the Voormis were a somewhat aboriginal race, with an ethnic heritage of the darkest and most revolting type. And it was commonly said that Knygathin Zhaum himself possessed an even murkier strain of ancestry than the others, being related on the maternal side to that queer, non-anthropomorphic god, Tsathoggua, who was worshipped so widely during the subhuman cycles. And there were those who whispered of even stranger blood (if one could properly call it blood) and a monstrous linkage with the swart, Protean spawn that had come down with Tsathoggua from elder worlds and exterior dimensions where physiology and geometry had both assumed an altogether inverse trend of development. And, because of this mingling of ultra-cosmic strains, it was said that the body of Knygathin Zhaum, unlike his shaggy, umber-colored fellow-tribesmen, was hairless from crown to heel and was pied with great spots of black and yellow; and moreover he himself was reputed to exceed all others in his cruelty and cunning.

For a long time this execrable outlaw was no more to me than an horrific name; but inevitably I thought of him with a certain professional interest. There were many who believed him invulnerable by any weapon, and who told of his having escaped in a manner which none could elucidate from more than one dungeon whose walls were not to be scaled or pierced by mortal beings. But of course I discounted all such tales, for my official experience had never yet included any one with properties or abilities of a like sort. And I knew well the superstitiousness of the vulgar multitude.

From day to day new reports reached me amid the preoccupations of never-slighted duty. This noxious marauder was not content with the seemingly ample sphere of operations afforded by his native mountains and the outlying hill-regions with their fertile valleys and well-peopled towns. His forays became bolder and more extensive; till one night he descended on a village so near Commoriom that it was usually classed as a suburb. Here he and his filthy crew committed numerous deeds of an unspecifiable enormity; and bearing with them many of the villagers for purposes even less designable, they retired to their caves in the glassy-walled Eiglophian peaks ere the ministers of justice could overtake them.

It was this audaciously offensive act which prompted the law to exert its full power and vigilance against Knygathin Zhaum. Before that, he and his men had been left to the local officers of the countryside; but now his misdeeds were such as to demand the rigorous attention of the constabulary of Commoriom. Henceforth all his movements were followed as closely as possible; the towns where he might descend were strictly guarded; and traps were set everywhere.

Even thus, Knygathin Zhaum contrived to evade capture for month after month;

and all the while he repeated his far-flung raids with an embarrassing frequency. It was almost by chance, or through his own foolhardiness, that he was eventually taken in broad daylight on the highway near the city's outskirts. Contrary to all expectation, in view of his renowned ferocity, he made no resistance whatever; but finding himself surrounded by mailed archers and bill-bearers, he yielded to them at once with an oblique, enigmatic smile—a smile that troubled for many nights thereafter the dreams of all who were present.

For reasons which were never explained, he was altogether alone when taken; and none of his fellows were captured either coincidentally or subsequently. Nevertheless, there was much excitement and jubilation in Commoriom, and every one was curious to behold the dreaded outlaw. More even than others, perhaps, I felt the stirrings of interest; for upon me, in due course, the proper decapitation of Knygathin Zhaum would devolve.

From hearing the hideous rumors and legends whose nature I have already outlined, I was prepared for something out of the ordinary in the way of criminal personality. But even at first sight, when I watched him as he was borne to prison through a moiling crowd, Knygathin Zhaum surpassed the most sinister and disagreeable anticipations. He was naked to the waist, and wore the fulvous hide of some long-haired animal which hung in filthy tatters to his knees. Such details, however, contributed little to those elements in his appearance which revolted and even shocked me. His limbs, his body, his lineaments were outwardly formed like those of aboriginal man; and one might even have allowed for this utter hairlessness, in which there was a remote and blasphemously caricatural suggestion of the shaven priest; and even the broad, formless mottling of his skin, like that of a huge boa, might somehow have been glossed over as a rather extravagant peculiarity of pigmentation. It was something else, it was the unctuous, verminous ease, the undulant litheness and fluidity of his every movement, seeming to hint at an inner structure and vertebration that were less than human—or, one might almost have said, a sub-ophidian lack of all bony framework—which made me view the captive, and also my incumbent task, with an unparallelable distaste. He seemed to slither rather than walk; and the very fashion of his jointure, the placing of knees, hips, elbows and shoulders, appeared arbitrary and factitious. One felt that the outward semblance of humanity was a mere concession to anatomical convention; and that his corporeal formation might easily have assumed—and might still assume at any instant—the unheard-of outlines and concept-defying dimensions that prevail in trans-galactic worlds. Indeed, I could now believe the outrageous tales concerning his ancestry. And with equal horror and curiosity I wondered what the stroke of justice would reveal, and what noisome, mephitic ichor would befoul the impartial sword in lieu of honest blood.

It is needless to record in circumstantial detail the process by which Knygathin Zhaum was tried and condemned for his manifold enormities. The workings of the law were implacably swift and sure, and their equity permitted of no quibbling or delay. The captive was confined in an oubliette below the main dungeons—a cell hewn in the basic, Archean gneiss at a profound depth, with no entrance other than a hole through which he was lowered and drawn up by means

of a long rope and windlass. This hole was lidded with a huge block and was guarded day and night by a dozen men-at-arms. However, there was no attempt at escape on the part of Knygathin Zhaum: indeed, he seemed unnaturally resigned to his prospective doom.

To me, who have always been possessed of a strain of prophetic intuition, there was something overtly ominous in this unlooked-for resignation. Also, I did not like the demeanor of the prisoner during his trial. The silence which he had preserved at all times following his capture and incarceration was still maintained before his judges. Though interpreters who knew the harsh, sibilant Eiglophian dialect were provided, he would make no answer to questions; and he offered no defense. Least of all did I like the unabashed and unblinking manner in which he received the final pronouncement of death which was uttered in the high court of Commoriom by eight judges in turn and solemnly reaffirmed at the end by King Loquamethros. After that, I looked well to the sharpening of my sword, and promised myself that I would concentrate all the resources of a brawny arm and a flawless manual artistry upon the forthcoming execution.

My task was not long deferred, for the usual interval of a fortnight between condemnation and decapitation had been shortened to three days in view of the suspicious peculiarities of Knygathin Zhaum and the heinous magnitude of his proven crimes.

On the morning appointed, after a night that had been rendered dismal by a long-drawn succession of the most abominable dreams, I went with my unfailing punctuality to the block of *eighon*-wood, which was situated with geometrical exactness in the center of the main square. Here a huge crowd had already gathered; and the clear amber sun blazed royally down on the silver and nacarat of court dignitaries, the hodden of merchants and artizans, and the rough pelts that were worn by outland people.

With a like punctuality, Knygathin Zhaum soon appeared amid his entourage of guards, who surrounded him with a bristling hedge of billhooks and lances and tridents. At the same time, all the outer avenues of the city, as well as the entrances to the square, were guarded by massed soldiery, for it was feared that the uncaught members of the desperate outlaw band might make an effort to rescue their infamous chief at the last moment.

Amid the unremitting vigilance of his warders, Knygathin Zhaum came forward, fixing upon me the intent but inexpressive gaze of his lidless, ocher-yellow eyes, in which a face-to-face scrutiny could discern no pupils. He knelt down beside the block, presenting his mottled nape without a tremor. As I looked upon him with a calculating eye, and made ready for the lethal stroke, I was impressed more powerfully and more disagreeably than ever by the feeling of a loathsome, underlying plasticity, an invertebrate structure, nauseous and nonterrestrial, beneath his impious mockery of human form. And I could not help perceiving also the air of abnormal coolness, of abstract, impenetrable cynicism, that was maintained by all his parts and members. He was like a torpid snake, or some huge liana of the jungle, that is wholly unconscious of the shearing ax.

I was well aware that I might be dealing with things which were beyond the ordinary province of a public headsman; but nathless I lifted the great sword in a clean, symmetrically flashing arc, and brought it down on the piebald nape with all of my customary force and address.

Necks differ in the sensations which they afford to one's hand beneath the penetrating blade. In this case, I can only say that the sensation was not such as I have grown to associate with the cleaving of any known animal substance. But I saw with relief that the blow had been successful: the head of Knygathin Zhaum lay cleanly severed on the porous block, and his body sprawled on the pavement without even a single quiver of departing animation. As I had expected, there was no blood—only a black, tarry, fetid exudation, far from copious, which ceased in a few minutes and vanished utterly from my sword and from the *eighon*-wood. Also, the inner anatomy which the blade had revealed was devoid of all legitimate vertebration. But to all appearance Knygathin Zhaum had yielded up his obscene life; and the sentence of King Loquamethros and the eight judges of Commoriom had been fulfilled with a legal precision.

Proudly but modestly I received the applause of the waiting multitudes, who bore willing witness to the consummation of my official task and were loudly jubilant over the dead scourge. After seeing that the remains of Knygathin Zhaum were given into the hands of the public grave-diggers, who always disposed of such offal, I left the square and returned to my home, since no other decapitations had been set for that day. My conscience was serene, and I felt that I had acquitted myself worthily in the performance of a far from pleasant duty.

KNYGATHIN ZHAUM, as was the custom in dealing with the bodies of the most nefarious criminals, was interred with contumelious haste in a barren field outside the city where people cast their orts and rubbish. He was left in an unmarked and unmounded grave between two middens. The power of the law had now been amply vindicated; and every one was satisfied, from Loquamethros himself to the villagers that had suffered from the depredations of the deceased outlaw.

I retired that night, after a bounteous meal of *suvana*-fruit and *djongua*-beans, well irrigated with *foum*-wine. From a moral standpoint, I had every reason to sleep the sleep of the virtuous; but, even as on the preceding night, I was made the victim of one cacodemoniacal dream after another. Of these dreams, I recall only their pervading, unifying consciousness of insufferable suspense, of monotonously cumulative horror without shape or name; and the ever-torturing sentiment of vain repetition and dark, hopeless toil and frustration. Also, there is a half-memory, which refuses to assume any approach to visual form, of things that were never intended for human perception or human cognition; and the aforesaid sentiment, and all the horror, were dimly but indissolubly bound up with these.

Awaking unrefreshed and weary from what seemed an eon of thankless endeavor, of treadmill bafflement, I could only impute my nocturnal sufferings to the *djongua*-beans; and decided that I must have eaten all too liberally of these nutritious viands. Mercifully, I did not suspect in my dreams the dark, portentous symbolism that was soon to declare itself.

Now must I write the things that are formidable unto Earth and the dwellers of Earth; the things that exceed all human or terrene regimen; that subvert reason; that mock the dimensions and defy biology. Dire is the tale; and, after seven lustrums, the tremor of an olden fear still agitates my hand as I write.

But of such things I was still oblivious when I sallied forth that morning to the place of execution, where three criminals

of a quite average sort, whose very cephalic contours I have forgotten along with their offenses, were to meet their well-deserved doom beneath my capable arm. Howbeit, I had not gone far when I heard an unconscionable uproar that was spreading swiftly from street to street, from alley to alley throughout Commoriom. I distinguished a myriad cries of rage, horror, fear and lamentation that were seemingly caught up and repeated by every one who chanced to be abroad at that hour. Meeting some of the citizenry, who were plainly in a state of the most excessive agitation and were still continuing their outcries, I inquired the reason of all this clamor. And thereupon I learned from them that Knygathin Zhaum, whose illicit career was presumably at an end, had now reappeared and had signalized the unholy miracle of his return by the commission of a most appalling act on the main avenue before the very eyes of early passers! He had seized a respectable seller of *djongua*-beans, and had proceeded instantly to devour his victim *alive*, without heeding the blows, bricks, arrows, javelins, cobblestones and curses that were rained upon him by the gathering throng and by the police. It was only when he had satisfied his atrocious appetite that he suffered the police to lead him away, leaving little more than the bones and raiment of the *djongua*-seller to mark the spot of this outrageous happening. Since the case was without legal parallel, Knygathin Zhaum had been thrown once more into the oubliette below the city dungeons, to await the will of Loquamethros and the eight judges.

The exceeding discomfiture, the profound embarrassment felt by myself, as well as by the people and the magistracy of Commoriom, can well be imagined. As every one bore witness, Knygathin Zhaum had been efficiently beheaded and buried according to the customary ritual; and his resurrection was not only against nature but involved a most contumelious and highly mystifying breach of the law. In fact, the legal aspects of the case were such as to render necessary the immediate passage of a special statute, calling for rejudgment, and allowing re-execution, of such malefactors as might thus return from their lawful graves. Apart from all this, there was general consternation; and even at that early date, the more ignorant and more religious among the townsfolk were prone to regard the matter as an omen of some impending civic calamity.

As for me, my scientific turn of mind, which repudiated the supernatural, led me to seek an explanation of the problem in the non-terrestrial side of Knygathin Zhaum's ancestry. I felt sure that the forces of an alien biology, the properties of a trans-stellar life-substance, were somehow involved.

With the spirit of the true investigator, I summoned the grave-diggers who had interred Knygathin Zhaum and bade them lead me to his place of sepulture in the refuse-grounds. Here a most singular condition disclosed itself. The earth had not been disturbed, apart from a deep hole at one end of the grave, such as might have been made by a large rodent. No body of human size, or, at least, of human form, could possibly have emerged from this hole. At my command, the diggers removed all the loose soil, mingled with potsherds and other rubbish, which they had heaped upon the beheaded outlaw. When they reached the bottom, nothing was found but a slight stickiness where the corpse had lain; and this, along with an odor of ineffable foulness which was its concomitant, soon dissipated itself in the open air.

Baffled, and more mystified than ever, but still sure that the enigma would per-

mit of some natural solution, I awaited the new trial. This time, the course of justice was even quicker and less given to quibbling than before. The prisoner was again condemned, and the time of decapitation was delayed only till the following morn. A proviso concerning burial was added to the sentence: the remains were to be sealed in a strong wooden sarcophagus, the sarcophagus was to be inhumed in a deep pit in the solid stone, and the pit filled with massy boulders. These measures, it was felt, should serve amply to restrain the unwholesome and irregular inclinations of this obnoxious miscreant.

When Knygathin Zhaum was again brought before me, amid a redoubled guard and a throng that overflowed the square and all of the outlying avenues, I viewed him with profound concern and with more than my former repulsion. Having a good memory for anatomic details, I noticed some odd changes in his physique. The huge splotches of dull black and sickly yellow that had covered him from head to heel were now somewhat differently distributed. The shifting of the facial blotches around the eyes and mouth had given him an expression that was both grim and sardonic to an unbearable degree. Also, there was a perceptible *shortening* of his neck, though the place of cleavage and reunion, midway between head and shoulders, had left no mark whatever. And looking at his limbs, I discerned other and more subtle changes. Despite my acumen in physical matters, I found myself unwilling to speculate regarding the processes that might underlie these alterations; still less did I wish to surmise the problematic results of their continuation, if such should ensue. Hoping fervently that Knygathin Zhaum and the vile, flagitious properties of his unhallowed carcass would now be brought to a permanent end, I raised the sword of justice high in air and smote with heroic might.

Once again, as far as mortal eyes were able to determine, the effects of the shearing blow were all that could be desired. The head rolled forward on the *eighon*-wood, and the torso and its members fell and lay supinely on the maculated flags. From a legal viewpoint, this doubly nefarious malefactor was now twice-dead.

Howbeit, this time I superintended in person the disposal of the remains, and saw to the bolting of the fine sarcophagus of *apha*-wood in which they were laid, and the filling with chosen boulders of the ten-foot pit into which the sarcophagus was lowered. It required three men to lift even the least of these boulders. We all felt that the irrepressible Knygathin Zhaum was due for a quietus.

Alas for the vanity of earthly hopes and labors! The morrow came with its unspeakable, incredible tale of renewed outrage: once more the weird, semi-human offender was abroad, once more his anthropophagic lust had taken toll from among the honorable denizens of Commoriom. He had eaten no less a personage than one of the eight judges; and, not satisfied with picking the bones of this rather obese individual, had devoured by way of dessert the more outstanding facial features of one of the police who had tried to deter him from finishing his main course. All this, as before, was done amid the frantic protests of a great throng. After a final nibbling at the scant vestiges of the unfortunate constable's left ear, Knygathin Zhaum had seemed to experience a feeling of repletion and had suffered himself to be led docilely away by the jailers.

I and the others who had helped me in the arduous toils of entombment were

more than astounded when we heard the news. And the effect on the general public was indeed deplorable. The more superstitious and timid began leaving the city forthwith; and there was much revival of forgotten prophecies; and much talk among the various priesthoods anent the necessity of placating with liberal sacrifice their mystically angered gods and eidolons. Such nonsense I was wholly able to disregard; but, under the circumstances, the persistent return of Knygathin Zhaum was no less alarming to science than to religion.

We examined the tomb, if only as a matter of form; and found that certain of the superincumbent boulders had been displaced in such a manner as to admit the outward passage of a body with the lateral dimensions of some large snake or muskrat. The sarcophagus, with its metal bolts, was bursten at one end; and we shuddered to think of the immeasurable force that must have been employed in its disruption.

BECAUSE of the way in which the case overpassed all known biologic laws, the formalities of civil law were now waived; and I, Athammaus, was called upon that same day before the sun had reached its meridian, and was solemnly charged with the office of re-beheading Knygathin Zhaum at once. The interment or other disposal of the remains was left to my discretion; and the local soldiery and constabulary were all placed at my command, if I should require them.

Deeply conscious of the honor thus implied, and sorely perplexed but undaunted, I went forth to the scene of my labors. When the criminal reappeared, it was obvious to every one that his physical personality, in achieving this new recrudescence, had undergone a most salient change. His mottling had developed more than a suggestion of some startling and repulsive pattern; and his human characteristics had yielded to the inroads of an unearthly distortion. The head was now joined to the shoulders almost without the intermediation of a neck; the eyes were set diagonally in a face with oblique bulgings and flattenings; the nose and mouth were showing a tendency to displace each other; and there were still further alterations which I shall not specify, since they involved an abhorrent degradation of man's noblest and most distinctive corporeal members. I shall, however, mention the strange, pendulous formations, like annulated dewlaps or wattles, into which his knee-caps had now evolved. Nathless, it was Knygathin Zhaum himself who stood (if one could dignify the fashion of his carriage by that word) before the block of justice.

Because of the virtual non-existence of a nape, the third beheading called for a precision of eye and a nicety of hand which, in all likelihood, no other headsman than myself could have shown. I rejoice to say that my skill was adequate to the demand made upon it; and once again the culprit was shorn of his vile cephaloid appendage. But if the blade had gone even a little to either side, the dismemberment entailed would have been technically of another sort than decapitation.

The laborious care with which I and my assistants conducted the third inhumation was indeed deserving of success. We laid the body in a strong sarcophagus of bronze, and the head in a second but smaller sarcophagus of the same material. The lids were then soldered down with molten metal; and after this the two sarcophagi were conveyed to opposite parts of Commoriom. The one containing the body was buried at a great depth beneath monumental masses of stone; but

that which enclosed the head I left uninterred, proposing to watch over it all night in company with a guard of armed men. I also appointed a numerous guard to keep vigil above the burial-place of the body.

Night came; and with seven trusty trident-bearers I went forth to the place where we had left the smaller of the two sarcophagi. This was in the courtyard of a deserted mansion amid the suburbs, far from the haunts of the populace. For weapons, I myself wore a short falchion and carried a great bill. We took along a plentiful supply of torches, so that we might not lack for light in our gruesome vigil; and we lit several of them at once and stuck them in crevices between the flagstones of the court in such wise that they formed a circle of lurid flames about the sarcophagus.

We had also brought with us an abundance of the crimson *foum*-wine in leathern bottles, and dice of mammoth-ivory with which to beguile the black nocturnal hours; and eyeing our charge with a casual but careful vigilance, we applied ourselves discreetly to the wine and began to play for small sums of no more than five *pazoors,* as is the wont of good gamblers till they have taken their opponents' measure.

The darkness deepened apace; and in the square of sapphire overhead, to which the illumination of our torches had given a jetty tinge, we saw Polaris and the red planets that looked down for the last time upon Commoriom in her glory. But we dreamed not of the nearness of disaster, but jested bravely and drank in ribald mockery to the monstrous head that was now so securely coffined and so remotely sundered from its odious body. And the wine passed and re-passed among us; and its rosy spirit mounted in our brains; and we played for bolder stakes; and the game quickened to a goodly frenzy.

I know not how many stars had gone over us in the smoky heavens, nor how many times I had availed myself of the ever-circling bottles. But I remember well that I had won no less than ninety *pazoors* from the trident-bearers, who were all swearing lustily and loudly as they strove in vain to stem the tide of my victory. I, as well as the others, had wholly forgotten the object of our vigil.

The sarcophagus containing the head was one that had been primarily designed for the reception of a small child. Its present use, one might have argued, was a sinful and sacrilegious waste of fine bronze; but nothing else of proper size and adequate strength was available at the time. In the mounting fervor of the game, as I have hinted, we had all ceased to watch this receptacle; and I shudder to think how long there may have been something visibly or even audibly amiss before the unwonted and terrifying behavior of the sarcophagus was forced upon our attention. It was the sudden, loud, metallic clangor, like that of a smitten gong or shield, which made us realize that all things were not as they should have been; and turning unanimously in the direction of the sound, we saw that the sarcophagus was heaving and pitching in a most unseemly fashion amid its ring of flaring torches. First on one end or corner, then on another, it danced and pirouetted, clanging resonantly all the while on the granite pavement.

The true horror of the situation had scarcely seeped into our brains, ere a new and even more ghastly development occurred. We saw that the casket was bulging ominously at top and sides and bottom, and was rapidly losing all similitude to its rightful form. Its rectangular outlines swelled and curved and were horri-

bly erased as in the changes of a nightmare, till the thing became a slightly oblong sphere; and then, with a most appalling noise, it began to split at the welded edges of the lid, and burst violently asunder. Through the long, ragged rift there poured in hellish ebullition a dark, ever-swelling mass of incognizable matter, frothing as with the venomous foam of a million serpents, hissing as with the yeast of fermenting wine, and putting forth here and there great sooty-looking bubbles that were large as pig-bladders. Overturning several of the torches, it rolled in an inundating wave across the flagstones and we all sprang back in the most abominable fright and stupefaction to avoid it.

Cowering against the rear wall of the courtyard, while the overthrown torches flickered wildly and smokily, we watched the remarkable actions of the mass, which had paused as if to collect itself, and was now subsiding like a sort of infernal dough. It shrank, it fell in, till after awhile its dimensions began to re-approach those of the encoffined head, though they still lacked any true semblance of its shape. The thing became a round, blackish ball, on whose palpitating surface the nascent outlines of random features were limned with the flatness of a drawing. There was one lidless eye, tawny, pupilless and phosphoric, that stared upon us from the center of the ball while the thing appeared to be making up its mind. It lay still for more than a minute; then, with a catapulting bound, it sprang past us toward the open entrance of the courtyard, and disappeared from our ken on the midnight streets.

Despite our amazement and disconcertion, we were able to note the general direction in which it had gone. This, to our further terror and confoundment, was toward the suburb of Commoriom in which the body of Knygathin Zhaum had been entombed. We dared not conjecture the meaning of it all, and the probable outcome. But, though there were a million fears and apprehensions to deter us, we seized our weapons and followed on the path of that unholy head with all the immediacy and all the forthrightness of motion which a goodly cargo of *foum*-wine would permit.

No one other than ourselves was abroad at an hour when even the most dissolute revellers had either gone home or had succumbed to their potations under tavern tables. The streets were dark, and were somehow drear and cheerless; and the stars above them were half stifled as by the invading mist of a pestilential miasma. We went on, following a main street, and the pavements echoed to our tread in the stillness with a hollow sound, as if the solid stone beneath them had been honeycombed with mausolean vaults in the interim of our weird vigil.

In all our wanderings, we found no sign of that supremely noxious and execrable thing which had issued from the riven sarcophagus. Nor, to our relief, and contrary to all our fears, did we encounter anything of an allied or analogous nature, such as might be abroad if our surmises were correct. But, near the central square of Commoriom, we met with a number of men, carrying bills and tridents and torches, who proved to be the guards I had posted that evening above the tomb of Knygathin Zhaum's body. These men were in a state of pitiable agitation; and they told us a fearsome tale, of how the deep-hewn tomb and the monumental blocks piled within it had heaved as with the throes of earthquake; and of how a python-shapen mass of frothing and hissing matter had poured forth from amid the blocks and had van-

ished into the darkness toward Commoriom. In return, we told them of that which had happened during our vigil in the courtyard; and we all agreed that a great foulness, a thing more baneful than beast or serpent, was again loose and ravening in the night. And we spoke only in shocked whispers of what the morrow might declare.

Uniting our forces, we searched the city, combing cautiously its alleys and its thoroughfares and dreading with the dread of brave men the dark, iniquitous spawn on which the light of our torches might fall at any turn or in any nook or portal. But the search was vain; and the stars grew faint above us in a livid sky; and the dawn came in among the marble spires with a glimmering of ghostly silver; and a thin, fantasmal amber was sifted on walls and pavements.

Soon there were footsteps other than ours that echoed through the town; and one by one the familiar clangors and clamors of life awoke. Early passers appeared; and the sellers of fruits and milk and legumes came in from the countryside. But of that which we sought there was still no trace.

We went on, while the city continued to resume its matutinal activities around us. Then, abruptly, with no warning, and under circumstances that would have startled the most robust and affrayed the most valorous, we came upon our quarry. We were entering the square in which was the *eighon*-block whereon so many thousand miscreants had laid their piacular necks, when we heard an outcry of mortal dread and agony such as only one thing in the world could have occasioned. Hurrying on, we saw that two wayfarers, who had been crossing the square near the block of justice, were struggling and writhing in the clutch of an unequalled monster which both natural history and fable would have repudiated.

In spite of the baffling, ambiguous oddities which the thing displayed, we identified it as Knygathin Zhaum when we drew closer. The head, in its third reunion with that detestable torso, had attached itself in a semi-flattened manner to the region of the lower chest and diaphragm; and during the process of this novel coalescence, one eye had slipped away from all relation with its fellow or the head and was now occupying the navel, just below the embossment of the chin. Other and even more shocking alterations had occurred: the arms had lengthened into tentacles, with fingers that were like knots of writhing vipers; and where the head would normally have been, the shoulders had reared themselves to a cone-shaped eminence that ended in a cup-like mouth. Most fabulous and impossible of all, however, were the changes in the nether limbs: at each knee and hip, they had re-bifurcated into long, lithe proboscides that were lined with throated suckers. By making a combined use of its various mouths and members, the abnormality was devouring both of the hapless persons whom it had seized.

Drawn by the outcries, a crowd gathered behind us as we neared this atrocious tableau. The whole city seemed to fill with a well-nigh instantaneous clamor, an ever-swelling hubbub, in which the dominant note was one of supreme, all-devastating terror.

I shall not speak of our feelings as officers and men. It was plain to us that the ultra-mundane factors in Knygathin Zhaum's ancestry had asserted themselves with a hideously accelerative ratio, following his latest resurrection. But, despite this, and the wholly stupendous enormity of the miscreation before us, we were still prepared to fulfil our duty

and defend as best we could the helpless populace. I boast not of the heroism required: we were simple men, and should have done only that which we were visibly called upon to do.

WE SURROUNDED the monster, and would have assailed it immediately with our bills and tridents. But here an embarrassing difficulty disclosed itself: the creature before us had entwined itself so tortuously and inextricably with its prey, and the whole group was writhing and tossing so violently, that we could not use our weapons without grave danger of impaling or otherwise injuring our two fellow-citizens. At length, however, the strugglings and heavings grew less vehement, as the substance and lifeblood of the men were consumed; and the loathsome mass of devourer and devoured became gradually quiescent.

Now, if ever, was our opportunity; and I am sure we should all have rallied to the attack, useless and vain as it would certainly have been. But plainly the monster had grown weary of all such trifling and would no longer submit himself to the petty annoyance of human molestation. As we raised our weapons and made ready to strike, the thing drew back, still carrying its vein-drawn, flaccid victims, and climbed upon the *eighon*-block. Here, before the eyes of all assembled, it began to swell in every part, in every member, as if it were inflating itself with a superhuman rancor and malignity. The rate at which the swelling progressed, and the proportions which the thing attained as it covered the block from sight and lapsed down on every side with undulating, inundating folds, would have been enough to daunt the heroes of remotest myth. The bloating of the main torso, I might add, was more lateral than vertical.

When the abnormality began to present dimensions that were beyond those of any creature of this world, and to bulge aggressively toward us with a slow, interminable stretching of boa-like arms, my valiant and redoubtable companions were scarcely to be censured for retreating. And even less can I blame the general population, who were now evacuating Commoriom in torrential multitudes, with shrill cries and wailings. Their flight was no doubt accelerated by the vocal sounds, which, for the first time during our observation, were being emitted by the monster. These sounds partook of the character of hissings more than anything else; but their volume was overpowering, their timbre was a torment and a nausea to the ear; and, worst of all, they were issuing not only from the diaphragmic mouth but from each of the various other oral openings or suckers which the horror had developed. Even I, Athammaus, drew back from those hissings and stood well beyond reach of the coiling serpentine fingers.

I am proud to say, however, that I lingered on the edge of the empty square for some time, with more than one backward and regretful glance. The thing that had been Knygathin Zhaum was seemingly content with its triumph; and it brooded supine and mountainous above the vanquished *eighon*-block. Its myriad hisses sank to a slow, minor sibilation such as might issue from a family of somnolent pythons; and it made no overt attempt to assail or even approach me. But seeing at last that the professional problem which it offered was quite insoluble; and divining moreover that Commoriom was by now entirely without a king, a judicial system, a constabulary or a people, I finally abandoned the doomed city and followed the others.

Spawn of Inferno

By HUGH B. CAVE

Blackness, thick and impenetrable, rolled up like a thick fog, as a Thing from outer darkness sated its ghastly appetite

IT IS a well-remembered fact, at least in certain circles, that in the year 184– the quiet little city of Darbury, in western Massachusetts, was for a brief interlude of blackness completely in the grip of mortal terror. From time eternal, darkness has brought fear; and the darkness that swept down on the streets and homes of Darbury, during those hours of madness, was a thousand times more intense than night. Under cover of it, as under the cover of an impenetrable fog, murders were done and houses looted. For a sudden brief interval of horror, the entire city stopped breathing and became wrapped in a living layer of pitch.

Learned men, of course, made haste to offer explanations. The sun, they said, had done something unusual. Or an unknown planet had come between earth and sun, in some dizzy flight through the ether. Or a mighty magnetic force had suddenly seized that particular portion of the earth's crust in its grip.

The people, ignorant of even the rudiments of science, accepted those idiotic explanations and believed them. Years later, when I read of that "dark interlude," I too believed the current explanations. Being a man of medicine, I knew no more of advanced science than the ordinary layman.

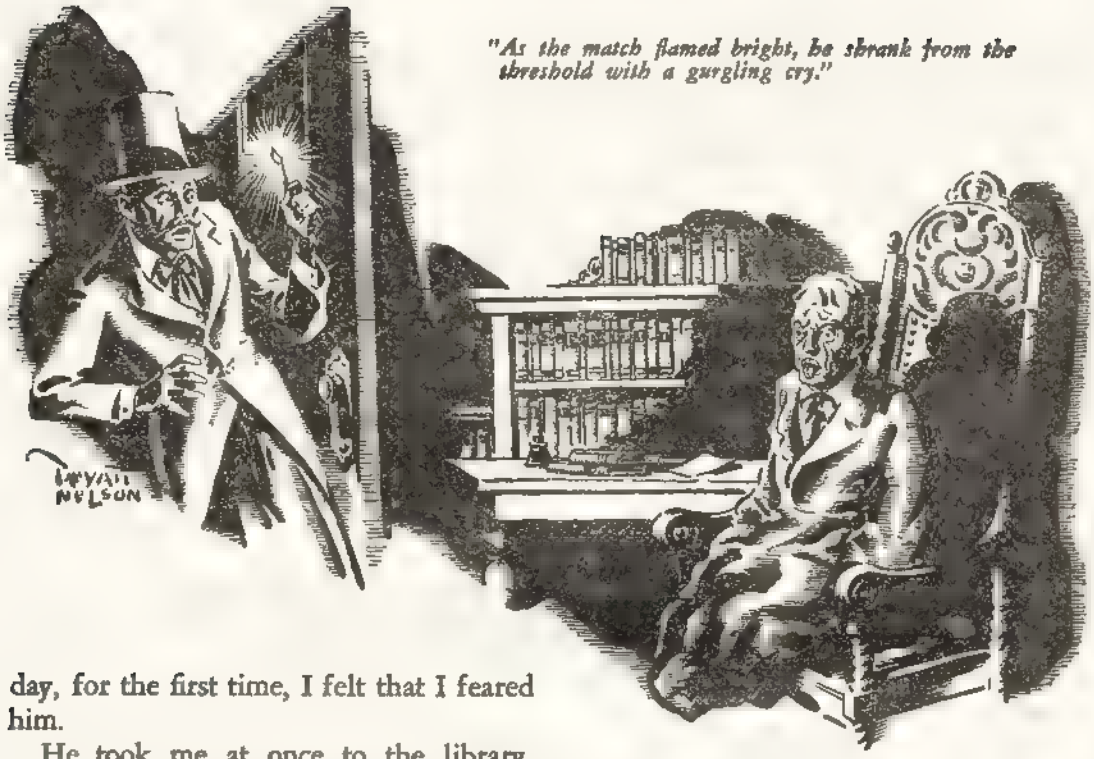
But today, with those hours of terror long since past and forgotten, I found something else. I had chanced, as was often my habit, to visit the library of old Doctor Bruce Moller, who died several years ago at the age of ninety-four. In his musty rooms today I prowled from one shelf to another until, by some queer twist of fortune, I picked up an old, withered thing in red leather covers. The title of it was *Creatures of the Beyond*—strangely significant in view of the yellow manuscript that lay between its pages!

The first sheet of that manuscript was missing. I give the rest of it here precisely as it was set down in the fine, condensed handwriting of Doctor Moller, in the thick sheaf of papers that I found in his library. When I say that I had known Doctor Moller for several years, and known him to be an utterly sane and honest man, I think I have said enough.

Here is Doctor Moller's account:

. . . have just come from the home of Antone Sergio. He is a peculiar man, Sergio, growing older and visibly weaker with each successive time that I see him. Never have I seen a man so cynical and bitter toward mankind. He has, of course, no living kin. Lives alone in that house of gloom on Lantor Street, with no companion other than the rat-faced Lober, his assistant.

When I went there today, Sergio himself let me in the front door; and as I followed him down the hall I felt that I was following a man already dead, or following some strange jungle creature, shaggy and deformed. He is not actually deformed, in the medical sense of the word, but his crouching shuffle is like the walking of an anthropoid ape. To-



"As the match flamed bright, he shrank from the threshold with a gurgling cry."

day, for the first time, I felt that I feared him.

He took me at once to the library, where he sat down abruptly and faced me, leaving me to stand ill at ease and considerably confused by his hostile attitude.

"Moller," he said—he pronounces my name with that peculiar accent of his, until it sounds like Merler—"you have come here today to examine me?"

His tone was practically a challenge. I felt that he hated me, and it was a most uncomfortable feeling.

"You've put yourself in my care," I scowled. "If you wish to consult another physician, Sergio, that's your privilege. But as long as I'm looking after you, it's my duty to come here."

He studied me for some time, as if he would read my mind and find there some other reason for my coming. I believe he suspected me of prying into his scientific secrets.

"Yes," he muttered, "it is your duty to come. I am not well, of course. My head——" And then suddenly he got to his feet, glaring at me with those deep, close-set eyes of his. "But you would like to know what I do in this house, Moller, would you not? You're curious! You want to snoop around and find out things!"

He was completely transformed. I did not dare to resist him when he seized my arm and dragged me to the door. His grip was heavy; his fingers dug savagely into my coat; his eyes were afire with some unholy glow of triumph.

He led me then down the long corridor that extends through the entire lower floor of the house; and, at the end of it, pushed me into a narrow, ill-lighted room that lay beyond. Before I had taken two steps over the threshold, I knew that the room was his laboratory, the place where he spent hours and days at a time, pottering about with his instruments.

"I will not have you coming here at

all hours," he snapped irritably. "You come to spy on me!"

I protested. He smothered my protest with a burst of vehemence which startled me.

"I would rather tell you what I do here! *Tell* you, do you understand? I won't have you prowling about like a thief in the night. Because I am not well, you use me as an excuse to come here. I will show you what is in this room, and then I will defy you! Do you hear?"

He was standing with his arms half lifted, facing me. His tangled head of white hair came only to my shoulders; and beyond him I could see his assistant, Lober, standing at the far end of the room, staring mutely toward us.

Then Sergio seized my arm again and pulled me to a wooden bench that extended from one end of the chamber to the other, along the wall. As he bent over it, ignoring me for an instant, I saw a pile of loose papers, charts. With one of these in his hand, he turned on me again.

"You're not a scientist," he declared. He knew I was not; yet I could tell from the triumph in his voice that it gave him pleasure to mock my ignorance. "Then look here! Look!"

He lifted the chart to my eyes. I studied it intently, and scowled at it. It seemed to me to be nothing more than a huge circular outline, crossed with intricate perpendicular and horizontal markings which signified nothing.

"You think you know all the secrets of this paltry universe of ours," he gloated. "You've read the Bible and studied your medical books, and you're quite certain of everything under the sun. You blind fool! I'm going to tell you some truths!"

And he told me. It was madness. He spoke of a world of darkness; he described horrible shapeless denizens of what he called the Dimension of Death. He was not concerned with ordinary beliefs of a spirit world, or of communication between the dead and the living. Good heavens, no! His talk was of mighty elementals—vicious monsters which were hovering within reach, black and hungry, separated only by what he termed the "walls of dimension." I can see no good in repeating such madness here.

"Do you know what would happen, Moller," he demanded, "if the gate were opened? If these demons of the Death Dimension should discover a doorway to our puny earth?"

I DID not trouble to answer him. I wanted very much to go away; yet there was a quality of eagerness in his voice that fascinated me. Lober, too, was listening from his place at the other end of the chamber. He had not moved, but he had stopped his work, so that the room was utterly silent except for the shrill voice of my patient.

As for Sergio, he stared at me in silence for some time. Then, slowly, the glare in his eyes died. He laughed softly.

"Come," he said. "I'll show you."

He took me into the shadows, where the light was so dim that I could scarcely see the things about me. As we went, he began once again to talk. This time his voice was soft, no longer shrill with excitement.

"There is a gateway, Moller," he said. "It is the door to hell. Some day I will open it, and then you will know that I speak truths. Look there."

I followed him a dozen more paces, and there, almost invisible, I saw a solid block of some unnamed metal—something that looked for all the world like a huge square of carborundum. It was colorless and opaque, crystalline in ap-

pearance, and yet the many tiny facets gave off no light. About four feet square it seemed, with a score of thin wires attached to its surface. My companion was pointing, with a hand that was very careful not to reach too close, to the medley of wires.

"What is it?" he said. "Perhaps some day I'll tell you, Moller. It is the result of most of my life. A combination of four substances, fused together under terrific heat. Lifeless. Dead. Not a spark of power in it.

"But here"—his hand jerked aside to fall on a huge, polished machine—"here is the thing that gives it life! And in the core of that block, Moller, are mirrors. Hundreds of them. Have you ever tried to place three right angles at right angles to one another? No? Try it, Moller. Then you will realize what I mean when I tell you that there, inside that mass, are *seven* of them!"

His voice had, strangely enough, become shrill again. He was intensely excited. His fingers closed over a black-handled switch at the edge of the table beside him. He looked first at me, then at the switch. Then he said sharply:

"A moment after I have thrown this, the world will know horror. Do you hear, Moller? Do you understand? In the space of one moment I can release into this dimension a horde of demons from the Land of Death! And I can control them! I can make them do as I will!"

He stood rigid. There was no color in his face; it was ghastly white with emotion.

"Do you know why I have told you this?" he rasped. "Because I wish to! Because I want some living person to know what is happening when the world becomes black and cold with the vileness of the Death Dimension! Because you are an ignorant, stupid fool without imagination—and will not believe me! Now go!"

He pointed to the door. I think he would have struck me if I had not obeyed him. Yet as I left the room I was conscious of a pair of staring eyes—Lober's eyes—following me. Then, a few moments later, I had traversed the corridors and stood on the stone steps of that madhouse.

I am writing this down because, though I believe the whole affair to be a fantastic hoax, I have been possessed with a most unnatural sense of foreboding ever since leaving Antone Sergio's house. The sight of him, white-haired, bitter, defiant, standing in that dimly lighted room filled with strange instruments of science, has left an impression upon me that I can not easily erase.

Perhaps some day I shall laugh at myself for recording such nonsense; but the thought comes to me that after all I am merely a man of medicine, ignorant of the secrets of science and metaphysics. This man knows more than I, certainly; and if he has the power he claims to have, he will not hesitate to use it! He is alone in the world and, as I have said, bitter in his relations with it. He would send it to destruction, if he could, with a grim laugh.

However, there is nothing more to say now. Perhaps at some later day I may have something to add to this account.

It is now two days since my uncanny visit to Antone Sergio's home. For twenty-four hours after writing the first part of this account of my relations with him, I considered myself an utter fool for doing so. Now, after what has happened—though it may have no direct connection with Sergio's "machine"—I think myself a fool no longer!

Last evening, about seven o'clock, a

street urchin came to my office in the square. I was in at the time (I still reside in the little suite of rooms at the rear of the office) and he placed in my hands a sealed envelope.

The envelope—I have it before me now—is gray in color and bears in black ink my name: Bruce Moller. The only significant clue to the handwriting is the fact that the words are written in a strained, back-handed manner, as if the writer were unused to such an angle.

But the contents needed no detailed study. They were inscribed in the same strained characters, and the words were these:

"You are perhaps prepared for death, Doctor Moller? If not, prepare yourself, for you have less than twenty-four hours to live. You are to be destroyed."

That was all. There was no signature, no fantastic details such as usually accompany uncouth threats of violence. No reason for my impending death; merely a straightforward statement that I should die!

For an hour, perhaps, I studied the note. During that interval I went over my past history with the utmost care, seeking to remember the name of a man who might desire to murder me. My practise has been a successful one; I have caused no deaths on the operating-table, nor have I been indirectly associated with any deaths. I could find no reason why any sane man should wish to destroy me.

I had put the note down with a shrug, and was about to retire, when the door of my room echoed to a slight knock. Before I could cross the room, the door opened. My old colleague, Pedersen, stood there on the sill.

He came forward quietly. Pedersen is a stolid chap who seldom shows excitement; he is large and strong as an ox; it was he who founded the Darbury Athletic Club. And the first thing I noticed, as he advanced toward me, was the gray envelope in his fist. An envelope precisely the same as the one that lay at that moment on my table!

"I've received the most infernal threat, Moller," he said. "Twenty-four hours they give me to live. And the damned thing is not signed!"

That was like Pedersen; he is the sort of fellow who would pay more attention to the irregularity of form than to the warning of destruction. When I turned and indicated the note that lay on my own table, he merely went to it, picked it up, and read it. Then he replaced it.

"What do you think, Moller?" he demanded, swinging on me. "Same writing, same paper. Sent, of course, by the same man. What man in Darbury or the surrounding district might wish to have us both murdered?"

I had no answer. He was merely repeating a question to which I had already failed to find an answer—except that he now included himself in it.

"I was on my way to After Street, Moller, when this thing was thrust into my hand," he frowned. "It was dark, and I missed seeing the chap's face. Small fellow, he was—rather shrivelled. Of course, I didn't see him closely. He didn't intend me to. When I finally stopped under a street lamp and read the note—took me some time, too, in the gaslight—he was gone."

I nodded. "Mine," I said, "came by messenger, an hour ago. I'd better keep in touch with you. There may be something behind these notes that we don't understand." And as I spoke, I could not get away from his description of the man who had waylaid him: "Small fellow, rather shrivelled." Could it have been Sergio? Did my half-mad patient really believe in the power of his "Gateway to the Death Dimension," and in-

tend to throw that queer black-handled switch?

I said good-night to Pedersen rather lamely, and stood at the door, listening to the beat of his footsteps on the stairs. Then, shutting the door quietly, I went back to the table and once again took up that gray envelope.

That was last night. I am wondering, as I write this, what the next move in our little comedy will be!

I HAVE just learned, by messenger, that Vernon, too, has received a threat of death. Vernon, in his note, describes the letter he received (it came by runner, as mine did) as being "written on gray paper in a queerly reversed script, as if the fellow had made a definite effort to disguise his hand." He says further: "I can't see any reason for the thing, Moller. Good Lord, I've been in medical work for a good many years, but I don't believe I've made any enemies as severe as this. He can murder me if he likes, though I'm inclined to believe the whole thing is a hoax; but what will it get him? I've no money—never knew a medical man yet who did have!—and the most he can get is the satisfaction of seeing my dead carcass. Have you any explanation?"

An explanation? No, I had none. When I had finished reading the note, I was no nearer a solution than before. But now, thank God, I am!

It came to me a moment ago. Vernon, Pedersen, and I—what had we three done together at any time? And then, with a start, I realized the truth. It was we three who condemned Carmen Veda to the asylum for the insane, less than a month ago. The case had been brought to us for examination, had been separately analyzed by each of us. We had found the girl to be completely insane, and had recommended that she be confined.

But these notes of murder—who could have sent them? I had myself carefully looked up the girl's history and discovered that she had no relatives. Perhaps, if she had had some one to care for her, we should have been less severe in our decision; but she had been friendless, destitute, completely alone. A pretty girl, too, and hardly more than twenty; but youth and beauty are no guarantee against an unbalanced mind. Pedersen, especially, had maintained that she would be better cared for in the institution than if she were allowed to prowl the streets in her weakened mind. And so, at the recommendation of the three of us (the law requires more than a single testimony in such a case) the girl was put away.

And so, too, I have stumbled on the solution—if that *is* the solution—of our mysterious threats. What will follow now, I do not know; but I shall make haste to acquaint both Pedersen and Vernon with my discovery. It is better that they be warned at once of their danger. The allotted twenty-four hours will be up soon. Whatever is to be done must be done at once. It is morning now, and daylight, and I assume that we are safe enough until nightfall. When darkness comes, I intend to remain in my rooms and be ready for——

IT IS three weeks now since I wrote that last interrupted line of this narrative. As I worked over the manuscript, I was sitting at my table by the window so that the light would reach me.

And then, in the midst of my efforts, the room in which I sat became completely black. Black, I say—not merely dark!

It did not come suddenly. To be truthful, I do not know just how it did come. I was engrossed in my account and became conscious, all at once, that the chamber was no longer warm with sun-

light. It was as if a great black cloud had slowly obscured the sun. That was my first impression.

I got up, groping and bewildered, and went to the window. Outside, the square was a blur of pitch; and even as I watched, motionless and completely astonished, it became a complete void. I could see nothing; not even the outline of the First Unitarian Church and the tower. I remember how deeply that fact impressed me; for on the blackest of black nights the tower inevitably loomed against the sky line a spear-point sentinel, one shadow against another. Now there was no shadow. There was nothing!

Dazed, and vaguely afraid, I went stumbling back across the room to my table, and lit the lamp there. By its feeble glow I could see the face of the clock on the mantel. The hour was eleven o'clock *in the morning*.

As I turned away, a single thought possessed me, to the exclusion of everything else. This uncanny darkness was a dreadful thing, to be sure—it was utterly without explanation—but the danger that lay *in* the darkness was what spurred me on. I must go to Pedersen, go to Vernon, and warn them. In this vicious blackness, brought on by some unearthly phenomenon, they were doubly in peril. Whoever had written those notes, threatening us with destruction, would no doubt take advantage of the sheltering gloom and creep upon us like a shadow.

A shadow! The thought held mocking humor. Even as I tugged on my coat and threw open the door of my room, the lamplight from my table was throwing shadowy, shapeless forms over the walls behind me. The light itself was being smothered, as effectively as if armless hands were lowering a shroud over its wick. As I groped down the stairs, the darkness triumphed. With macabre significance it welled out and around me, burying me.

How I found Pedersen's home—how I succeeded in getting across the square—I do not quite know. At every step I was conscious of muffled excited voices: voices filled with fear and terror. Shapes brushed past me. At intervals, as I stumbled blindly along, things struck against me, thrusting me aside. I heard screams—women's screams—from nowhere. Once I heard a screech almost at my feet, and then the snarling, animal-like sounds of two bodies fighting in the gutter.

For perhaps half an hour I hurried on, finding my way by instinct and because I had traversed the same route so many times before. As I went, I heard the tower clock strike the half-hour almost directly above me; yet I could see nothing—not even the outlines of the buildings I stumbled against. Voices—things—hurrying past, stumbling over one another, lurching into me, snatching at me, cursing, screaming—there was nothing more.

I knew, too, that under cover of the blackness murders were being committed, and the blackness itself was murder. It was no ordinary gloom; it was alive with a thin, tenuous, almost inaudible whining sound that seemed to come from the very bowels of it. It was a living, viscous thing, or a million living things—a wave of slithering, down-pressing exhalation, utterly vile and evil. Within it, the alley rats were abroad, gloating over their opportunity for plunder. More than once I heard cries of abject horror, so close that I might have reached out and touched the women who uttered them; and they were cut short as unseen filthy paws closed over the lips of the unfortunate victims.

And so I reached Pedersen's home. I fell while climbing the steps; and to my surprize the door hung wide. Mechanically I stepped into the hall. Not a sound

came from the big structure above me. There was no light, no lamp burning.

I called aloud, shouting my friend's name. The empty rooms only echoed my own outcry. And then—I say this with no attempt to be dramatic—an unutterable fear came over me.

For a moment I stood there in the hall, undecided whether to turn and run or to advance further. The living darkness was in my eyes, in my throat, vibrant with its high-pitched *whirring* sound and hideous with a stench of fetid decay. It clung here, in the corridor of Pedersen's home, a thousand times more ugly than in the street outside. It was stalking me.

Then I found false courage. Resolved to find my friend or at least discover where he had gone, I crept forward. I say "crept"—it was creeping, nothing more. With both hands outflung before me as a barrier of defense, I went slowly down the hall. Somehow in the dark I found the door of Pedersen's library, the room where he spent most of his time. And this door, too, was open. Never in all the years I had known Pedersen, had he gone off and left the door of his most private sanctum open.

Here I struck a match. The sulfur sputtered and suddenly flared bright; and I shrank from the threshold with a gurgling cry. I saw that scene only for an instant; yet as I write this account three weeks later, it is still vivid and frightful. Before me lay the narrow, book-lined room with its single table. A huge carved chair stood by the table; and in that chair, staring straight toward me, sat Pedersen.

When I say that the man's face was a mask of unspeakable horror, I mean just that. I have seen torment before, where torment is a routine thing. I have handled crushed, broken bodies on the operating-table; I have watched men and women die slow deaths when the more merciful thing would have been a bullet. But Pedersen's face, when I looked into it at that moment, was the essence of all agony. The eyes protruded like sticks of charcoal; the tongue was a black, bloated, lolling horror. And the body below that was no body at all, but a shapeless, bloody mass of sodden pulp, propped there in mockery.

I did not strike another match. Why I did not whirl about and rush away, I do not know. Perhaps it was loyalty that dragged me to my friend's side; perhaps it was something else which is better left unexplained. I know that I paced forward and stood over him, and I was aware of a stench that did not come from his mutilated body. The entire chamber was filled with it—a reek of obscene rot that was strangely like the smell of sour milk. It hung about the body like a malignant *presence*, of the exhalations of some malignant presence which *had* been here.

It was that vileness, more than anything else, which thrust me back and caused me to realize my position. Good God, I was standing here like a blind man, stiff with horror, while another of my friends was in danger of the same death! If the murderer had found one victim, he would seek a second. He would go to Vernon's rooms, or possibly to mine. Wherever he went, I must reach there first!

I stumbled out of the room, along the passage to the door. As I went out into the utter blackness of the street, I realized for the first time that I was cold, horribly cold. It was as though every spark of heat and radiation had been removed. The pavement was like ice. The very air, as I breathed it, seemed to penetrate my lungs with needle-like sharpness.

I SHOULD have known, then, what had happened. That combination of darkness and cold, coming so soon after Antone Sergio's threats of annihilation, should have brought the solution to me in a flash. But it did not. At that moment I could think of but one thing—that I must get to Vernon at once, without an instant's delay. The horror of my own situation was, during that interim of madness, a secondary thing. I scarcely heard the screams and cries that echoed about me as I hurried through the veil. I hardly felt the lunging shapes that struck out at me. I must get to Vernon! To Vernon!

His rooms were half a mile distant, across the square again. I walked quickly, as quickly as I dared. There were no lights to guide me. Had there been—had the lamp-lighters come out of their holes and created their usual friendly patches of yellow glow in the dark—I might have been less terrified. The street lamps would not have been much, to be sure. Merely flickering haloes of uncertain light at rare intervals. But they would have enabled me to see the shadowed outlines of my surroundings. They would have been beacons, and by groping from one to another I might have found my way across the square, and reached that obscure by-street which harbored my friend's rooms, with more haste.

Yet I knew, even as I cursed the veil, that those same street lamps would have availed nothing. Good heavens, if this infernal dark had smothered sunlight, how could artificial flames of gaslight prevail against it? Even the insignificant match which I had struck in Pedersen's library—even that had been extinguished. *Extinguished,* I say! It had not burned itself out; it had been snuffed out, choked out, annihilated by this foul and monstrous darkness which was a living, breathing, whining entity!

God, how I wanted light! Had there been even a faint glow from the upper window of Vernon's rooms, as I approached, I might have shouted for joy. But there was none; there was nothing. I stumbled up the steps; and the lower door, like the door of Pedersen's house, swung wide before me. I rushed into the hall, shouting my friend's name. There was no response. I heard no sound at all as I ascended the winding staircase. The door on the upper landing, too, was ajar. I remember clawing my way along the wall and colliding with it, and being almost grateful for its very presence. Here at last was something sane and solid; here were familiar surroundings, albeit lightless and silent. Vernon would be inside, and I could end my horrible pursuit of shadows. Vernon was a level-headed, cool fellow, rugged and indifferent to danger. He would laugh at my fears and find an explanation for the awful darkness and cold which had descended upon us.

I pushed the door wide, eagerly. With one hand on the knob and one foot poised over the sill, I became rigid. A cry of stark terror jangled from my lips, and I remember hearing it echo and re-echo through the upper reaches of the structure above me.

It is hard to convey the full awfulness of that scene. In the first place, the room was not dark; it was alight with an unearthly greenish glow which emanated from the uncouth shape before me. No hue of heaven or hell was ever like that oily, viscous mass of writhing vapor, dangling half-way between floor and ceiling, above Vernon's chair. No living thing born of woman was ever even remotely like that hideous abhorrence. No stench from the foulest slaughter-house

ever approached that vile reek of living death and embryonic putrescence.

The thing had no certain outlines, no definite form. It possessed no single human characteristic—arms, legs, or face. It was a thousand times more horrible than any twisted mockery of human life. It was like a monstrous malformed devil-fish with bloated, swollen tentacles; and from the very center of its loathsome mass came the sound of its breathing.

Breathing, I call it! God, that sound! Like a gigantic slug the thing enveloped Vernon's chair—and it was *eating!* I could hear the sucking of its unseen maw. I could hear its shapeless lips—if it *had* lips—drooling blood and tearing flesh. I could hear bones snapping, splintering, grinding. . . .

And then I saw!

People have asked me, since that night of inferno, why I refuse to work over the operating-table; why I shudder at the sight of torn flesh. They say I am getting old and fearful of using the knife. But no fear of old age can ever be like the awful torment of that instant!

Before my eyes the vile thing moved. Would to God I had stepped back out of range of vision; but I stood there, transfixed, and watched. The monster slithered sidewise, to fasten itself more securely on its victim. For perhaps five seconds I gazed upon the mangled, pulpy shape beneath it—the pitiful form which had once been Vernon.

Then I ran.

The thing did not follow me. I doubt if it even realized my presence, or cared. I stumbled blindly, madly, down the corridor. I descended the staircase at crazy speed. In another instant I was outside, running, with a dead, cold fear in my heart, toward Lantor Street and the gloomy house which held Antone Sergio's terrible machine.

I REMEMBER little of that wild flight. The black streets were practically abandoned, and so cold that I could scarcely breathe. I raced through Ames Street, on the south side of the square, and gasped recklessly on. Once or twice I heard those all too familiar sounds which told their grim story of the horrors that were going on in cover of the dark. A woman screamed; men fought; a child ran from me in terror, sobbing pitifully. Then the gravel path and stone steps of Sergio's house lay before me. The heavy door opened to my thrust. I was in the unlighted corridor, reeling toward the room which had given birth to all the horrors of hell.

I groped to the bottom of the winding staircase. All about me, as I felt my way to the upper level, hung that shrill, thin, whining noise which was the voice of the living dark. Here, near its source, it was like a wail triumphant; it was the drone of a million invisible insects, giving out sound and sense and odor.

And then I heard something else—something human and sinister. A sharp intake of breath; a rustle of loose clothing. I had reached the top of the stairs, and I stopped abruptly. In that opaque veil I could see nothing, yet I sensed the presence of a hostile creature close to me. When I heard that sudden rush of feet, and the snarling human voice, I was stiff and poised for contact.

A lunging, clawing form fell upon me. I did not step back. Had I retreated, the weight of the fiend who battled with me would have hurled me against the banister, and down over it to certain death. Instead, I struck out as best I could. I am young enough and strong enough to be a match for anything my size, and this clawing thing was hardly as strong as I. He was like a small, savage monkey, hurling his body against mine with in-

sane fury. I did the only thing possible —swung about so that his body was wedged between me and the wall, and struck upward with all my strength. The clawing thing became suddenly silent. His fingers loosened their grip on my throat. When I stepped back, he slumped to the floor.

He was not dead, of course. His rat-like face glared up at me; and that face, even in the darkness and in defeat, was savagely triumphant. So triumphant that it told me, in a single glance, the secret of the horror that gripped the community about me. I did not wait for a second glance!

THE door of Antone Sergio's laboratory was a dozen strides distant. I reached it and seized the knob frantically. The barrier was locked. I flung myself against it, time after time. Something splintered, broke. The door clattered inward. I rushed forward; and even as I crossed the threshold I heard a muffled cry from the darkness before me.

A sputtering match burned in my fingers then; burned just long enough for me to discover the gaunt, massive shape of Antone Sergio's mad dynamo. In gloom again I groped toward it, crashing against the heavy table that stood in my path. Wires caught at my feet. I kicked them aside furiously. I could hear the moan of the machine itself—an undercurrent to the vibrant whining that was all about me.

And then I stopped. It was one thing to rush blindly forward with heroic thoughts of destroying the monster which Sergio had created. It was another thing to come in contact with that throbbing metallic giant of evil. The thing was no longer cold and dead; it was fearfully alive!

I am no hero, no man of undaunted courage who will stalk into death for the thrill of it. I had no desire to hurl myself insanely upon this thing and be drawn into its vortex. I hesitated; I fell back. And as I stood there, my stiff fingers mechanically struck another match.

In the glow of that quickly smothered flame I saw something else. It was the shrivelled, distorted figure of Antone Sergio, bound to a table in the far corner of the room. Blood marred his face, and a livid crimson welt extended across his forehead. He was straining toward me, trying feebly to warn me.

"The switch—Moller! Turn it! Hurry——"

The match was dead in my fingers. I scratched another. My hand closed over the black-handled switch that controlled the strength of the infernal beast before me. With a sudden convulsive jerk I wrenched it loose.

What happened then I am not sure. A great sheet of blue flame shot toward me, enveloping me with uncanny quickness. Every separate sound in the room was drowned in a roaring blast of noise. I reeled backward, with both hands pressed against my eyes, and the bitter odor of burning metal in my nostrils. I saw a faint crimson glow well up from the twisted mass of metal before me. I was hot, terribly hot, as though I had suddenly been thrust from absolute cold into a pit of writhing fire.

Somehow, through that burning glare, I reached the man who was in that chamber of fury with me. I wrenched at his ropes until they crumbled in my hands—it was as though they had been eaten through by that first cloud of liquid flame.

I remember dragging him to the door, and hearing his muttered words as his tortured face came close to mine.

"He—tied me here—Moller—and turned it on! God knows—why—he did—it——"

Then I was in the corridor outside, on hands and knees, crawling. The voice of the darkness, on every side of me, was a screaming, howling wolf-cry. Sergio was beside me, whimpering. And from far away—from the direction of Vernon's rooms on the other side of the square—came a sound that screeched its way into my very brain. An endless,unfluctuating wail of the most utter agony, born in the deepest depths of hell and loosed from lips that were dying. Shrill and clear it came, murdering everything before it. Murdering my last feeble resistance.

Yet even as I succumbed to it, Sergio's words burned into me. "*He* turned it on!" And I remembered the face of the man who had attacked me at the top of the staircase. The face of Lober—Antone Sergio's assistant.

And as I write this account now, in the security of my own rooms, I still shudder at the bestial expression of that man's features as he fell upon me.

MUST there be another chapter to this narrative? After reading it over (it is now three months and four days since my last visit to Antone Sergio's home) I am afraid that I must add a word more.

It was nearly four hours before I regained consciousness on that night of terror. I lay in the corridor of Sergio's house, precisely where I had fallen.

My first thought was of that room of madness. I went to the door. The floor inside was covered with a fine metallic dust; and from the single narrow window in the wall came a ray of warm sunlight. In the corner of the room stood that infernal machine, now merely a twisted, broken pile of metal. And beside it, lying half on the floor and half against the coils of wire, I found Sergio.

I do not know how he returned to that room. I do know this: his love for the instrument he had worked fifty years to perfect was strong enough to overcome physical weakness. He had been dying when I dragged him through that strange glare of light to the safety of the corridor. He was dead when I found him.

I did not remain long. When I reached the street outside, the sun was once again a crimson ball in the evening sky, and that vicious darkness, with its accompanying cold, was a thing of the past.

I hurried to Vernon's rooms, praying fervently that my previous visit there might have been but a nightmare. But I found there, on the floor, a huddled, shapeless thing with shreds of clothing clinging to it. And all around it, over it, *in* it, lay a film of ill-smelling green slime. . . .

An hour later, when I arrived at Pedersen's home, the police were already at the scene. I saw Pedersen's body, and shuddered. And the police were saying, in whispers, that some fiend with terribly powerful hands——

I have since discovered one thing more, though. By investigation I have found that the notes sent to Pedersen, Vernon, and me were in the handwriting of Sergio's assistant. True, that handwriting was disguised; but it contained certain characteristics which were proof enough in themselves to hang the man.

He was not hanged. He was found later, roaming the streets of a near-by town, and has since been confined to the asylum, on my own recommendation. You ask me why? Because I have discovered that this poor unfortunate fellow was, on his own confession, a devoted dog to young Carmen Veda, who was sent to that same institution some time past. He has told me, with the most honest sorrow, that his

reason for threatening us was because we had taken from him the only thing in the world that he loved.

It was he who bound Sergio to the table. It was he who turned on that terrible machine which opened the gateway of the Death Dimension. It was he who released that malignant elemental from a macabre world and dispatched it on its errand of murder.

He was mad, to be sure; yet he might have been a fiend incarnate. I shudder to think of the nameless horrors which are even now clamoring at that closed Door, seeking admittance—and which he *might* have released, had he so desired.

And so, while I write this, those hours of inferno are a thing of the past. Scientists have already invented their explanations; and some of those inventions are mad enough to bring a smile even to my ignorant lips. The Gateway is closed. That abhorrent darkness with its living spawn is barred—for ever. And unless some meddling fellow chances to find this statement, the truth of that interlude of fear will for ever remain unknown. I have no desire to bring those hours of terror to the fore again. Better, far better, that they remain dead through time eternal.

The Phantom Hand

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

An astounding novel of Black Magic, eery murders, and weird occult happenings.

The Story Thus Far

HURRYING home to Cannonville from China, Don Wentworth is appalled to learn that his fiancée's father, Senator West, has been executed for the murder of Police Captain Morse, and that Lorna herself is mentally deranged and in the power of Godfrey Moore.

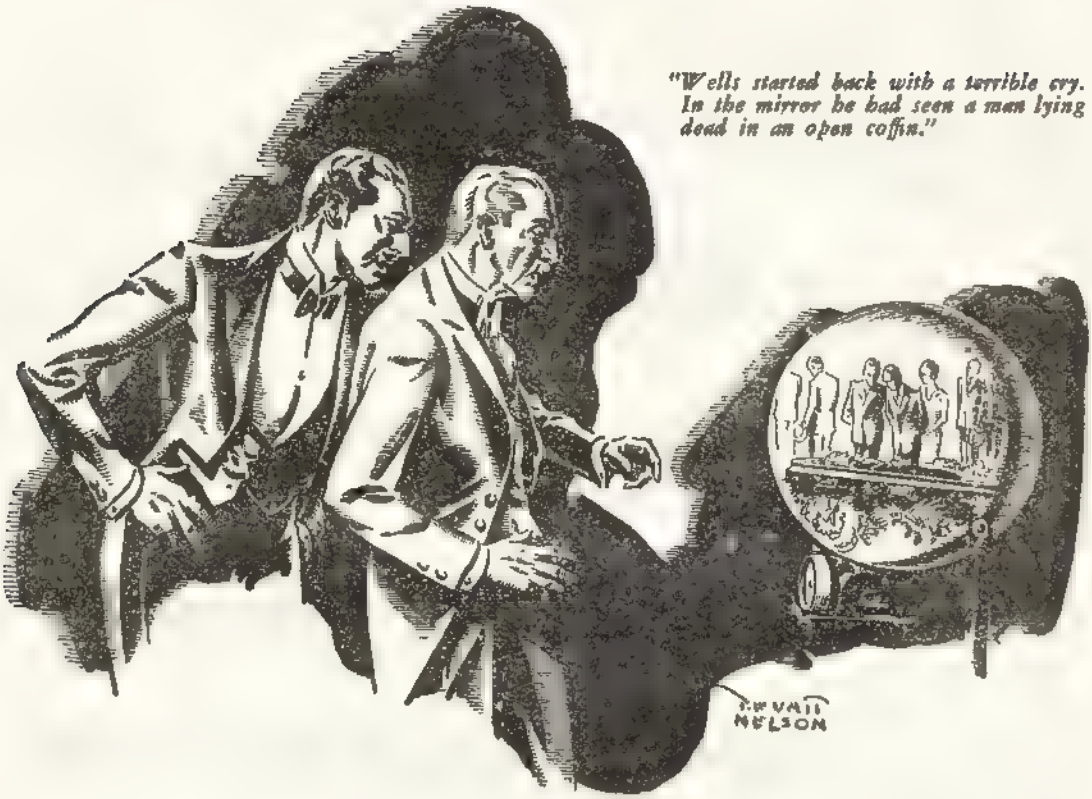
Moore, Abner Wells, Walstein and Moroni were instrumental in sending West to his death, and with the aid of a Persian, Sudh Hafiz, who is pastor of a Babist temple, Don sets to work to run down the guilty four.

Godfrey Moore, who is an initiate in Black Magic, kills his confederates, Moroni and Walstein, by invoking the aid of the phantom of West, who, perplexed and bewildered, and hardly realizing he is dead, has become a murderous, hate-crazed entity, manifesting through his daughter.

Don takes Lorna away and marries her, hoping to restore her to health. Starting with her at night on their honeymoon, he finds only her double in the car, and learns that Moore has recaptured her, leaving the phantom in her place.

Don drives madly to Moore's house and blunders into a room where Moore, by the aid of some intensely penetrating light rays, extracts his astral from his body and hurls it into a vault.

This story began in WEIRD TALES for July



"Wells started back with a terrible cry. In the mirror he had seen a man lying dead in an open coffin."

Exhausted, but not cowed, Don crouches like a wild beast against the wall. If this was death, he had never felt more alive.

The story continues:

"LORNA! Where are you?"

The words broke from Don's lips as his thoughts turned first toward the girl. He had not understood the power of thought in the Underworld. Before the words had left his lips he saw her at his side.

"I am here, Don," she whispered.

He stretched out his arms to enfold her, but they passed right through her; for phantom could no more touch phantom than it could touch flesh and body. He saw the mournful look on the girl's face, and cried out in agony.

"This isn't you!"

"And it isn't you, Don! Where are you?"

"I'm here, Lorna."

"I—I can't touch you," she faltered. "Are we dead, Don?"

"If we were dead, I think we could hold each other. Why did you leave me, Lorna?"

"He dragged me away. I don't know where I am. I'm in his house. He's bending over me. He's holding a glass of something to my lips, and yet I'm here with you at the same time. Hold me, Don, stay by me!"

But she was gone, and Donald's cry to her rang vainly in his ears. Already the past was becoming as obscure to him as the place in which he found himself. But suddenly forms emerged out of the gloom. He recognized Walstein, bleeding from a score of wounds, and a man who looked like an Italian, rushing at

him knife in hand. He saw Walstein raise a revolver, saw him stagger back under the knife-thrust.

"God," he cried, "where am I?"

Round and round in a horrid maze ran Walstein and his enemy, forgetting that they were dead, and perpetually re-enacting that last scene of horror. Don shuddered and thrust out his hands to hide it.

The wish transported him instantly far away. Now he was in a place he did not know. It was an apartment, and a stout, middle-aged man was seated at a desk. He was in his shirt-sleeves, but he wore a police officer's cap, and he was looking through some papers.

Suddenly a shape appeared behind him, and again Don cried out as he recognized Lemuel West. He saw West creep to the back of the other's chair, saw the fist descend with fearful force, battering in the man's skull. And he knew that he was witnessing the murder of Police Captain Morse by the phantom of Lemuel West, dispatched on that errand of murder by Godfrey Moore while West himself lay in a drugged sleep in Moore's house.

"Enough!" cried Don. Was he to witness nothing but these hideous repetitions of murder? "Senator West, that's all ended. You don't have to live it through again! Don't you know me? I'm Don Wentworth!"

The phantom raised its head and looked at him as if trying to remember.

Then of a sudden a small but brilliant light seemed to shine in the distance, and Don found himself approaching it as a moth is attracted to a candle-flame.

Before him, flitting uncertainly like the ghost he was, moved Lemuel West, and both halted at the light, peering and blinking, and utterly bewildered.

All Don's past life seemed to him like a dream, and even Lorna was half forgotten. But of a sudden a strong, clear voice sounded out of the heart of the flame and brought with it strength and, in some measure, remembrance:

"Don! This is I, Sudh Hafiz! Do you remember me?"

"I—I remember you," muttered Don uncertainly.

"Try hard, my friend! The gate is open for a little while, but without you we can do little. Try as you never tried before! Take the flame in your hand! See, it will not burn you!"

In his room in his house, Sudh Hafiz sat, his fine, spiritual face tense with anxiety. Opposite him, on the other side of a small table, sat the Persian boy whom Don had seen there, nominally a servant, but actually one of the most powerful materializing mediums who had ever come out of the Orient.

When the Master of Babism had sent Sudh Hafiz to the United States, to counter the challenge of Godfrey Moore, he had sent the boy with him. And never had Sudh Hafiz needed him more than when, in the midst of his service at the temple, he had realized intuitively that some danger threatened Don and Lorna.

Master of White Magic as he was, and in many respects emancipated from the bonds of love and hate and other human emotions, Sudh Hafiz was still human enough to have arrived at a feeling of intense friendship for the young American, who, in comparison with himself, was but a barbarian—and for the lovely girl whom he had made his wife only that evening.

Cutting the service short, he had withdrawn to the Holy of Holies, a small, circular room in the dome of the temple, and there, by an effort of intense concentration, he had entered into commun-

ion with his Master in the remote Persian monastery.

And there, with pale face and compressed lips, he had heard his own death-sentence. Sudh Hafiz knew that death is merely the anteroom to a larger life, but he was a man for all that. In far-off Persia he had a home, a mother, and a sweetheart, all of whom he had left to obey the orders of the Master who had sent him to barbarous America upon an unknown mission.

"Thou and he," came the inaudible words, "were bound together from the dawn of time, wherefore in this life Allah hath linked you as no other two men were linked since life began. For He hath placed the identical marks upon your fingers, whereby your twin souls may be known as one. Now choose, Sudh Hafiz, either to offer up thy life for him, or to return to thy native land and live out thy days, happy and prosperous, with the wife of thine own selection."

"Master, I have already chosen," murmured the Persian. "For I know that there is no upward progress on the Path except by sacrifice."

There was a long silence. Then a few words, heard in the soul rather than with the ears. And Sudh Hafiz arose, smiling and content.

Even had he never known Don Wentworth, he would still have laid down his life for him, at his Master's behest. But because he knew and loved him, and was assured that his death would free him and Lorna, Sudh Hafiz was doubly content.

He went into his house adjoining the temple and summoned the Persian boy. He placed him in the chair, and with a few passes threw him into a state of catalepsy. This was the moment when Don, wandering in the nether world, saw, and was attracted to the light.

"Take the flame in your hand!" commanded Hafiz, meaning that Don should enter into possession of the body of the sleeping boy.

And a moment later Don was looking out at the world through the boy's eyes, and struggling to remember who he was, and what he was doing. Only the strong, clear notes of Hafiz's voice kept his mind from wandering.

"Fix your mind clearly on yourself," commanded Sudh Hafiz. "Godfrey Moore holds your insensible body, and Lorna's, in his house, and he means to use your astral to perform some devilish purpose of his own. That can not be avoided, but a way out shall be found. Remember Lorna; remember your intent to free her father's name from the stain of blood-guilt. A desire once formed, a million elementals of earth, sea, and air, and fire hurry to assist in its accomplishment."

"I remember," answered Don through the boy's lips.

"Look beside you!" commanded the Persian.

Don looked. The misty shape beside him was that of Lemuel West, his face no longer distorted with passion, but perplexed and uncertain. Suddenly the medium began to writhe. He seemed to be undergoing a fearful internal struggle. The voices that issued from his lips were those of two men.

"Let me go!" A volley of curses followed. "Who are you? I know you now! Wentworth!"

"Step back, Don!" ordered Sudh Hafiz crisply. "Listen to me, Lemuel West. Do you know me?"

"I don't want to know you. Where's Abner Wells? He was at the back of the conspiracy. I'll make him suffer as he made me suffer! Weeks and months in the condemned cell, waiting for the rope, for a murder I never committed!"

"What about Moroni?"

"I killed Moroni. I saw him in a room. I sprang at him and broke his neck. I have grown very strong since I've been here. When are they going to hang me? Is there no hope of respite? Ah, I know you now! The Persian, who was good to me, came to me when all the rest had abandoned me except my daughter. Where's Lorna? Why doesn't she come to me? I am to be hanged tomorrow. No hope! No hope!"

"What about Walstein?"

"He's dead! I struck him from behind, and he thought it was one of Moroni's men, and they killed each other." A shriek of laughter burst from the boy's lips.

"How could you kill Walstein and Moroni, if you are in the condemned cell?"

"I—I—I don't know. Oh God, where am I?"

"Listen to me, Senator. You are dead. You paid the last penalty of the law."

"It's a lie. If I were dead, how could I be here?"

"It's true. Hold up your hand. Look, you can see through it! You are in the next world, Senator. The man beside you is Don Wentworth. He has married your daughter. They are happy. He is working to clear your name, and you are thwarting him by your mad desire for vengeance."

"I'm dead? You tell me I'm dead?"

"You are dead, Senator, and you must rest, and you will awake in a happier world, where you will forget the past, and all that you have ever dreamed of will be yours. Your wife waits for you there."

"God, Mildred? Is it true? I wouldn't trust any one but you. You came to me when the others . . . but I want Abner Wells first. He and Moore were the leaders."

"Senator, Abner Wells will pay the penalty, but not at your hand. So will Moore. You are thwarting all our efforts and assisting Moore by your blind attempts at vengeance. Rest, desist, leave vengeance to God!"

"Let me see Lorna first, and then I'll go. Ah!"

Again a cry broke from the boy's lips, his face was convulsed, and the tears streamed down his cheeks. Then came a voice like Don's:

"He's gone!"

"He has gone, I hope, for ever," answered Sudh Hafiz. "I am with you, Don, and helping you. For the present I can do no more. Keep your mind calm, and above all, remember!"

"YES, Moore, it was an amusing experience, my officiating as witness at the wedding ceremony," laughed Abner Wells, as he sat with Godfrey Moore in the latter's drawing-room. "They took me by surprize. A very charming bride, that little daughter of our friend West made. So they're off on their honeymoon, and if I had no interest in the matter, I'd say godspeed to them."

"A charming sentiment, my dear Abner," laughed Moore. "But how about those threats?"

Abner Wells scowled. "A few minutes after the ceremony we were sitting in my apartment. That Persian did most of the talking. Damn the fellow, what's he doing here?"

"Preaching Babism to our society women," laughed Moore. "A very harmless religion, a sort of brotherhood of man business. I helped to build the temple."

"Well, like most preachers, he's developed into an infernal busybody," Wells growled. "He seems to have got hold of Moroni's papers, including the one implicating me in the traction deal. And he

more than hinted that he's got evidence bearing upon West's death. He admitted he did'nt know whether I had the goods on you, Moore, or whether you had them on me, but he proposed that I help him bring home the proofs to you. That pair is going to hound you to the gallows, Moore, if they can do it. They scared me so, I agreed to work with them. Then, on second thought, I came to warn you."

"In which, Abner, you acted with your habitual good judgment," answered Moore. "But why the change of heart?"

"Because I'm more afraid of you than I am of them," replied the other. "You've shown me enough, Moore, to convince me that they are like children in comparison with you. Oh God, can't we lay this specter of Lemuel West?"

"That's what I've been wondering, Abner," answered Moore. "That Wentworth man is uncommonly active. However, I've got him scotched for the present. Would you like to have a look at him?"

"You've got him here?" asked Abner.

"I've got his body here, and I've got his soul in my private repository for souls, though he's still too bewildered to be aware of it. Later, I'm going to send him on a little errand for me, after which I shall reunite his soul and body and send him—to the gallows!"

And the chuckle that came from Godfrey Moore's lips was such as a fiend out of hell might have uttered.

"How?" cried Wells. "How can you send him to the gallows?"

"Why," answered Moore coolly, "that's easy. Wentworth's astral is going to perform my bidding, as West's did, and he is going to perpetrate a peculiarly brutal murder at an early date. Then I shall restore soul to body, and the police will get him, as they did West."

"But whom are you going to send him to murder?" Wells babbled.

"Oh, just a man whom I want out of the way," Moore replied. "Not yourself, my dear Abner. Did you think I meant you? I hope I have more sense of obligation to old friends than that."

Abner Wells breathed more freely. For a moment he had thought that it was he whose death Moore was planning.

"But come with me, and I'll show you Wentworth's body," Moore continued. "And afterward we'll take a look at the Akashic Record. It's always as well to know how these things are going to turn out, even though we can't change them."

He rose and led the way from the drawing-room, and along the passage to the door at the end. Opening it, he ushered Wells inside. The lights had been turned off, except for a single bulb in the roof, which illuminated the room fairly well.

On the floor lay Don's body. It looked like that of a dead man. To all appearance there was no life in it. Don did not seem to be breathing, and his face had the yellow, waxen color of death. Godfrey Moore spurned the body with his foot and laughed.

"He's dead!" exclaimed Abner Wells. The scholar, the elegant "blue-stocking," had a horror of death, especially of the sight of a dead person, that he had never been able to overcome.

"Not dead, but sleeping," laughed Moore. "No, my dear Abner, Wentworth's soul is still attached to the body by a tenuous bond, and very much bewildered just at present. However, by the time I have need of it, it will be sufficiently awake for my purposes. But I am speaking loosely. By 'soul', I mean his astral counterpart. You understand me very well."

"And the girl?" stammered Abner.

"Ah, she is in the same condition in a room upstairs. Would you like to have a look at her? No? I find that I can best command the presence of our friend West when her astral is entirely removed, like Wentworth's. In fact, I am thinking of sending West to assist Wentworth in the killing I have planned, for Wentworth is unusually obtuse, and West will be a very willing guide and counsellor."

"How—how are you going to do it? Do I know the man?"

"Know him, Abner? You've met him, but you don't know him in the least. He is no friend of yours. As to how I am going to do it, why, it will be the case of Captain Morse over again. I shall send Wentworth's astral to his apartment, where he will leave astral counterparts of his fingerprints all over the place. He will kill this person by the explosion of a certain amount of psychic force, and rob the place of any valuables of a portable nature.

"Meanwhile I shall revive Wentworth, reunite his soul to his body, and send him into Cannonville, somewhat dazed, to be picked up by the police. Come, let us see what the Akashic mirror says."

Mumbling feebly, overcome with horror, Abner Wells permitted Moore to conduct him into a smaller and perfectly dark room adjoining. Here a small mirror of burnished brass, slung upon gimbals, reflected faintly the light that came through the doorway for a moment.

"You have seen something of my inventions, Wells," said Moore, closing the door, "but this is my most inmost sanctuary, so to speak. Your readings have told you that the Akashic mirror, which shows past, present, and a short distance into the future, was well known to the Egpytians. Like everything else, it is not really a mystery, simply the viewing of the four-dimensional world-continuum, in which time is united to the other three dimensions.

He stepped forward and turned a screw. The mirror began to glow faintly, presenting what looked like a limpid, crystal sphere.

"I have spent some time adjusting this to our own particular world-lines," explained Moore as he touched the mechanism here and there. "To seek the future of any particular individual is not unlike adjusting a telescope to one particular star out of myriads. It takes time and patience, but I think I have got yours. Here, take a look, Abner!"

GINGERLY Abner Wells stepped to the mirror, beneath which a clockwork arrangement was emitting a soft, purring sound. He uttered a low exclamation of dismay, and Moore chuckled, as he saw scenes of his boyhood passing before him with swift movement.

Imagine a moving picture in which the hero grows older at the rate of a year in half a minute, and that was what Abner saw. He watched events of his school days, his early manhood, his first political aspirations, then his wooing and marriage, and the death of the son whom he had idolized, which had robbed him of all his hopes and first set his feet on crooked ways.

Then, after his wife's death, while still posing as the champion of honest government, he had sunk lower and lower, becoming a sinister power in the municipal and state governments. All this Abner saw, and the infinite pathos of his wasted life came home to him. He cried out and turned away, with a futile gesture.

Moore leaned forward and stopped the mechanism. "Not pretty, Abner?" he asked softly. "But human life is like that, a monument of broken hopes. Don't you

want to see just the little way into the future that the Akashic mirror allows?"

Feebly Abner Wells turned back, and Moore again started the mechanism. For a half-minute more Wells watched, then started back again with a terrible cry.

In the mirror he had seen, and Moore had seen over his shoulder, a man lying dead in an open coffin, surrounded by heaps of flowers, so real that it almost seemed as if they made the air of the little room fragrant. Crowds of persons of all degrees of life were filing past, gazing reverently at the dead.

And in that dead man Wells had recognized himself!

Moore chuckled again. "Don't worry, Abner," he said. "See, the mirror has clouded. The records of the future are invariably blurred and jumbled. That may not be for twenty years to come, and we must all go through it." And he led the way back into the drawing-room, where Wells faced him, with ashen face and livid, trembling lips.

"I wish to God I'd never met you, Moore!" he cried with loathing.

"I might reciprocate the compliment," answered Godfrey Moore, "but I can't. Frankly, my association with you has afforded me a good deal of amusement, much more than I derived from Walstein or Moroni. What, must you be going so soon?"—for Wells was trying to pick up his hat with fingers that would hardly hold the brim. "Well, thank you for coming here, Wells. And rest assured that there will be no further trouble with young Wentworth."

Outside the house, Abner Wells drew a breath of relief. A crooked smile twisted his face. One thing Moore, with all his cunning, had not discovered. He had lied to Sudh Hafiz and Don when they came to his apartment, for he was in possession of sufficient documentary evidence against Moore to send him to the gallows as the author of Morse's murder.

From Moroni, when drunk, from Walstein's safety deposit box, to which his power had gained him access, he had obtained the papers locked away in the safe in the wall of his apartment.

When Abner Wells had taken his departure, Godfrey Moore lit a cigar, steadied himself with a cocktail, and then went upstairs and brought down Lorna's body. The girl looked as lifeless as Don, and something like compassion showed on Moore's face as he laid her down in the light room and looked at her.

"If anything could have kept me in the paths of so-called virtue it might have been a woman like you, when I was a younger man," he muttered. "But I was just unlucky. I didn't meet her. Damn you!" he snarled at Don, shaking his fist at the inert body upon the floor. "You had all the breaks, but your end is going to be swift and certain now. As for you, Madam, we'll see that you are comfortably provided for in the State Asylum till the end of your days."

He had placed a large sofa in the room, and now, picking up Lorna's body and Don's, he deposited them there side by side. Then he stepped past the prism and, drawing a key from his pocket, opened a door, so cleverly concealed among the rocks that it would have been very difficult to have guessed at its existence there. Reaching inside, he pulled the clapper of a bell, which sent out a deep, booming sound intensified by the narrowness of the passage.

The opening disclosed in the bluffs, though it should have been quite dark, was not absolutely so. As a matter of fact, the tunnel was not more than twenty feet in length and opened upon the

other side of the bluff into the dense pine forest. Here, in a little cleared circle, were three or four negro shanties. At the sound of the bell a figure came shuffling through the tunnel, a human being, but bent so nearly double that it seemed to move on all fours to Godfrey's feet, where it crouched.

It was that of a negro woman of incredible age. She was actually well over a hundred and ten, and when she raised her face, scored and seamed by time, she looked more like an ape than ever. There was nothing human about the face as the creature fawned at Moore's feet, except the bright black eyes, out of which an entity of evil knowledge seemed to watch him.

"You want me, Massa?" croaked the creature.

"Yes, Mam, I want you," answered Moore. "And this will probably be the last time, for I am growing a little tired of my researches, which seem to lead on endlessly. I am disposed to retire into the odor of sanctity in my rôle of philanthropist. You look as if you were about ready to retire from this earthly scene too," he added brutally. "But you would hardly understand."

"Mam understand a good deal, Massa," croaked the old creature, with a smirk.

Godfrey Moore looked at her curiously. "Upon my soul, your experiences, though limited in character, must have been profound," he muttered. "You've seen a lot in your day, Mam."

"Mam has seen a lot," she cackled. "Mam has seen big men, strong men die like that!" She snapped her fingers. "All, all have died, but old Mam still lives."

Godfrey Moore frowned. "That's enough of that sort of talk!" he snarled. "How old were you when they brought you from Africa in the slave-ship?"

The crone rose slowly to her feet. Now she resembled nothing so much as a large chimpanzee, trying to stand upright. She was about four feet high, pressed down by the weight of years into an almost shapeless lump of body. Rags covered the hideous form and fell in tattered folds about her. Yet there was a malicious intelligence in the bright eyes, fixed on Godfrey's, that made him squirm inwardly.

"Mam was young gel," she cackled. "Most of the rest they died on the slave-ship, but Mam lived. The captain fell in love with Mam. She was pretty young gel, with eyes so bright, the rich plantation gennelman falled in love with her too, and many more. Nebber the gennelman young Mam couldn't make love her, if she tried."

"Yes? Well, you don't look it now," sneered Moore. "Tell me, how did you come to start this Obeah business?"

"After the War, when slaves set free, Mam come south to find her babby they took away from her and sold. When she not find it, she go to old Obeah woman to put the curse on the slave-dealer. So he died. His insides they burned up."

"Sounds pretty," commented Moore. "Go on!"

"Obeah woman, she teach Mam the business. Soon everyones they come to Mam for Obeah curses and love-charms. Heaps of pretty young girls, Mam give them love-charms. Then Mam come with Pap to the pine forests here, where Obeah is powerful because of slaves they killed here in the old days."

"Yes, you became the Mama of all the Obeah circles in the country. You were a big skate in your day, weren't you, Mama?"

The hag chuckled with glee. "Mam knows—Mam knows more than the gennelman thinks she knows," she cried.

"That may be," answered Moore, "but

when you work for me, I don't stand for any monkey tricks. Understand that? What you know is less than I've forgotten."

"Mam knows!" shrilled the hag, fixing her black eyes on Moore, and pointing a skinny finger at him. "Mam sees something the gennelman don't see. Mam sees the mark of death on him! Soon it comes, soon!" She grinned in gleeful malice out of her toothless mouth.

Godfrey Moore blanched. "Enough of your lies, you old hag!" he shouted, raising his arms as if to strike her; and, like a great ape, she dropped upon all fours again. "Say that was a lie!"

"Yes, yes, Massa, I was lying," she snivelled. "The gennelman will live long, many long years to come."

"Humph!" grunted Godfrey, only partly convinced. "Well, I need your services to call up two dead men. Get into the room. You'll get a hundred dollars, like you did before."

With a cackle of glee, the creature ambled into the light room, and Godfrey locked the door behind her.

He watched the hideous old crone closely, though he feigned to be uninterested, as she squatted on the floor within the chalk circle that she had drawn about the bodies of Don and Lorna. Crouching there, she began an incantation with much waving of arms and mumbling. Then from her rags she had drawn a snake, a harmless black snake, but the symbol of the horrible Obeah cult. She kissed the reptile on the mouth, mumbling and crooning over it.

She drew forth other objects, such as the inevitable rabbit's foot, a little image made of candle tallow, a small bowl filled with some repulsive mixture, all of which she set down inside the circle. Lastly she set down the snake, which slowly uncoiled, and seemed to follow her every movement, swaying with raised head in a slow and monotonous rhythmic movement, with darting tongue, its bright eyes watching hers.

Moore knew that there are a hundred different ways of getting into touch with the unseen, and he despised these Obeah practises as lower and clumsier methods. But he knew that the old crone was one of the half-dozen greatest mediums on earth, though untrained, and that the hocus-pocus business with the snake was her particular method of attaining her ends.

So, seated upon the now empty sofa, which had been drawn outside the circle, he smoked his cigar and watched her.

Slowly, following the movements of the negress' hands, the snake's head began to revolve in a circle that first widened and then narrowed. Slowly, muttering, the old crone began to revolve her head in the opposite direction. Faster and faster moved the heads of woman and snake, until they seemed like two dark streaks. And, as the negress crooned, the snake uttered a whining hiss.

Faster and faster, till the two heads seemed intertwined. Then suddenly the snake's tongue darted forth and kissed the woman's lips, and with a shriek the hag collapsed, an inert heap upon the floor, while the snake, coiled into a tight circle of folds, dropped beside her.

"Mamaloi! Mamaloi!" came from the lips of the crone. "I am here, Mamaloi!"

Godfrey Moore laid down his cigar. "Bring Wentworth and Lemuel West!" he commanded.

"It shall be done, Mamaloi. See, one of them comes, but the other is far away. The little ones are searching for him, the pretty, coal-black little ones who run so fast."

Moore frowned. He hated the regular

patter of the Obeah business. He fixed his eyes upon the two lifeless bodies within the circle of chalk.

There was no change in Lorna, but slowly a change came over Don's face. At first it was a mere replacing of the yellow, waxed look by white. Then a faint tinge of color came into the cheeks, the chest heaved violently, the eyes unclosed. Don breathed, and the blood circulated through his veins.

But the eyes, staring into Godfrey Moore's, were those of an automaton. Only the vital principle had returned, not the higher elements, and to recall this was the great secret of the Obeah art.

"Bring back Lemuel West, I tell you!" shouted Moore, as Lorna still lay within the circle, to all appearance lifeless.

"My little ones, why do you not obey?" asked the voice that came from the crone's lips.

"He will not come," came the immediate answer, in the thin, piping tones of a child.

"Put the mark of Obeah on him! Put it on his forehead and palms and breast."

"There is one who guards him. We can not go near him. We are afraid, Mamaloi. *Oweh! Oweh! Oweh!*" wailed the voice.

"Curse you, why don't you bring him?" shouted Moore.

"We can not," wailed the voice. "But the other one is here! See, the other one is here!"

With a grunt of anger Moore turned toward Don, who was sitting up, staring straight at him like an automaton. "Well, Wentworth, can you hear me?" he demanded.

"He hears you, Papaloi. He is ready to obey you, Papaloi!"

"You know the apartment of Abner Wells. You were there last night."

"He knows! He knows!"

"Go there this evening and kill him," Moore commanded.

"How shall he kill him? A spirit have no gun, no knife, nothing but wind."

"He will find a hammer in his hand," said Godfrey Moore. He was master of the Obeah woman in this field; he knew the power of suggestion. It was with such words that, hardly hoping for success, he had sent the astral of Lemuel West to kill Captain Morse. "Go there and kill him, and then come back to me, and, in return, I shall give you back your body, and Lorna, too."

Suddenly the face of the crone became fearfully convulsed, as if two entities were rending her. Screams broke from her lips, and fragments of voices made themselves heard.

"You must go, Don."

"I will not go."

"You must go, my friend. So it has been decreed, but all will be well."

A groan of anguish followed. The old hag collapsed into a huddled bundle on the floor. Suddenly Don spoke.

"I will go and kill Abner Wells," he said.

"I thought you would, my friend," grinned Moore. "You have realized that I have the power to enforce obedience to my orders. And when you come back, I am going to restore you to this body of yours. And I shall give you Lorna. You may resume your interrupted wedding-trip—at least, so far as I am concerned. Where's West, curse him?"

"He will not come. You can't make him come. There is a stronger power than yours protecting him."

"We'll see about that. At any rate, it's not protecting you."

"He has ordered me to obey you."

"Well, you'd best see to it," said Moore, with a snarl. "Go!" he added, and at the wave of his hand Don sank

down on the floor again, inert and lifeless, beside the equally inert body of Lorna.

Suddenly the hag leaped to her feet, her eyes blazing, her arm outstretched, skinny fingers pointing toward Godfrey. "Death!" she shrieked. "I see it coming fast toward you. Death! Death!"

"Cut out that stuff, you old fool!" shouted Moore, and he dealt the hag a buffet that sent her reeling backward. The snake, which had twined itself about her arm, raised its head and hissed at him angrily. "Get out of here, I'm through with you!" He opened his wallet and pulled out a hundred-dollar bill, which he flung at her feet, and the old woman snatched it up greedily and thrust it into her rags. She hobbled out through the door in the rock. Moore closed and locked it after her, then strode back into the light room. Letting Don's body lie there, he picked up Lorna and carried her upstairs again.

"Now I wonder whether there was an element of fake in that Akashic record business," mused Abner Wells, as he seated himself in his chair in his living-room, a stiff glass of whisky and water, half drained, on the table at his side. "You never can tell about Moore. He might have had some films made, and it would be just like him to go to any amount of trouble to play a trick like that on me."

None knew better than Wells the truth as to the existence of an unseen world. He had dabbled too much in occultism not to be aware of it. But so great was his distrust of Moore that he was apt to lose his mental balance when he tried to analyze him.

That picture of himself in the coffin! Wells shuddered and gulped down some more whisky. How he dreaded the thought of death! He had all the imagination of a cultured man, without any natural courage. Was Moore planning his death? It was quite possible, for he was convinced that Moore was responsible for the death of Walstein and Moroni.

His sister, who was inspector of public schools in Cannonville, was attending a conference, and would not be back till late. But Abner liked seclusion and solitude. He was not fearful of anything in that cozy room, several stories above the street. And he had a revolver near at hand, in a desk. Still, Moore was a dangerous customer, and Abner admitted that to himself. However, finishing the whisky, he felt more reckless.

He rose, and, going to the wall, pressed a panel, which flew open, disclosing the little safe built into a recess. It was fireproof, and it contained papers for which the reform newspaper would have given an enormous sum of money. Besides the papers that Wells had got from Moroni and from Walstein's safety deposit box, it contained priceless information as to Moore's early life.

Abner had been collecting this ever since he had come into touch with Moore years before. He had shrewdly foreseen the day when Moore would attempt to get him in his clutches. By means of these papers he could disclose the fact that Moore had served a penitentiary sentence in Ohio, five-and-twenty years before, for blackmail. Moore had also been connected with various discreditable spiritualistic enterprises for fleecing the public in bygone years.

There was enough there to damn Moore socially, if not to send him back to imprisonment. But the cream of the collection was a bunch of papers ticketed together and fastened with a clip.

Little by little, with incredible indus-

try, Wells had built up sufficient damning evidence against Moore to send him to the gallows as West's murderer. The best piece of evidence was the conversation between them in that very apartment, transmitted by dictaphone and taken down by a stenographer pledged to secrecy and liberally paid by Moore for holding her tongue.

"If he gets me, these go to the public," muttered Wells, taking out the batch of papers and laying them on the table. He poured himself out another glass of whisky, and omitted to close the safe door.

Now Wells did a curious thing. This was a part of his life of which even his sister was ignorant. He unlocked a drawer in a desk and took out a few sheets of paper and a planchette, a flat board with two wheels and a pencil for the third. Returning to his chair he placed a sheet of paper on the table, set the planchette down on it, and superimposed his hands.

Every night, when he was alone, he was accustomed in this way to receive communications from his dead son. Sometimes other entities would intrude into the conversation--rude spirits, jocular spirits claiming to be anybody from Isaiah to Napoleon, bewildered spirits lately dead, astrals of still living people, and astral shells, mere automata galvanized into temporary existence and scrawling crude messages with little or no meaning. On such occasions Wells would simply lay the planchette aside for the evening. But this did not happen very often.

Now, fingers poised on the slab of polished wood, he tried to shake off his fears and to make his mind as blank as possible. And soon he felt the planchette begin to move under his hands, with a vigor that denoted a clear-minded communicator. But it stopped in a moment, and Abner looked at what was written.

"Prepare to die," was what he read, and, after it, the initial of his son's name, Alfred.

Abner Wells's hands dropped, and the looked at the message in palsied fear.

"It's either some lying spirit or my own subconscious," he muttered. "Alfred, keep that crew away and come to me yourself," he pleaded, and began again. Again the machine wrote vigorously.

"Prepare to die at once," he read.

With a curse he rose and put the planchette away. As he locked the desk his telephone rang. The desk clerk announced that some one wanted to see him.

"What's his name?" snapped Abner.

"It's the pastor of the temple," came the answer.

Abner breathed more freely. He knew that Sudh Hafiz was not homicidal; still, after ordering him to be shown up, he took the precaution to slip the revolver into his coat pocket.

He waited, and about a minute later there came Sudh Hafiz's ring at the door. Abner opened it and greeted his visitor cordially.

"This is a pleasant surprize," he said. "Well, I hope our honeymooners got away happily last night."

The Persian looked at him fixedly, but made no reply. There was something terrifying in that calm, almost benign, and yet merciless look on his face. It was like that of a stern and inflexible judge.

"They must be well on their way by now, wherever they're going to," said Abner Wells uneasily.

"My friend," said Sudh Hafiz, "it is useless to lie to me. Last night I came to you with an offer of immunity. You accepted my terms; you broke the compact by going to Godfrey Moore."

"I—I—I admit it," stammered Abner Wells. "I'm in that devil's power. I——"

"No man is in the power of any one

except himself," replied Sudh Hafiz. "You must be prepared to take the consequences of your betrayal."

ABNER WELLS was no weakling; ordinarily pompous and overbearing, he beat down opposition with the force of his personality. But before the calm poise of Sudh Hafiz he cringed like a scolded schoolboy. Sudh Hafiz advanced to the table and picked up the sheet of paper on which the planchette pencil had written. Nothing but a pencil in a planchette could have traced those rather wavering letters diagonally across the paper.

"So you have been communing with the unseen?" asked Hafiz. "Do you believe these messages, Mr. Wells?"

"No!" shouted Abner. "Some lying spirit came between me and my son. I often get messages like that. They don't signify a thing."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Wells, you are in grave danger," replied his visitor. "Take up your fountain pen and let us see whether you can get any further communications."

"I can't write automatically except with the planchette," answered Abner surlily. "And I'm damned if I see what right you have to come here and meddle with my private affairs! You foreigners are all alike. We let you into this country, we give you an inch, and you try to take an ell!"

Sudh Hafiz, instead of replying, took up the fountain pen that was lying on the table and placed it in Abner's hand, at the same time placing the sheet of paper underneath it. Instantly Abner felt his fingers closing over it, while his hand was automatically drawn to the paper. And instantly the pen began to write, forming minute letters at such a speed as Abner's hand could never have written of his own volition.

The paper was covered from edge to edge and from top to bottom with letters so fine that the whole looked like a spider's tracery before Abner's hand rested. He glanced at the sheet in terror; fine as the writing was, it was so clear that he could discern each separate word, though the whole as yet possessed no significance for him.

"Now read what you have written!" Sudh Hafiz commanded, and Abner Wells obeyed.

He held the paper up to the light, which was growing strangely dim. He perused the words and a cry broke from his lips. For every dozen words or fewer were in a slightly different writing, and each phrase bore the same import, a warning of immediate death.

Abner recognized the handwriting of his wife, and that of his son; that of the business associate whom he had swindled years before and forced into a suicide's grave. There were the heavy strokes of Walstein's hand, reduced to one-quarter the size, but unmistakable. And there was the thin, ill-spelled writing of Moroni.

And these two cursed him, accusing him of being the cause of their death, threatening him with retribution in the unseen world. And there was a mocking phrase in the handwriting of the living Godfrey Moore. Worst of all was a taunting epithet in the writing of Lemuel West.

"Prepare to die!" was the import of each one of them.

Wells swung savagely upon the Persian. "It's a trick!" he shouted. "You think you can come here and blackmail me with your stage illusions! I'm not a fool! Hypnotism will account for it. How much do you want to stop this tomfoolery and leave me in peace? You'll

not be the first of your kidney that I've bought off!"

Sudh Hafiz merely looked at him compassionately, and there was something in that gaze of his that destroyed the last shreds of Wells's self-confidence.

"What right have you to come here?" he whined. "What right, I say? Begone!"

"The right of every man to warn another," replied the Persian solemnly. "I have come to warn you, Abner Wells, because, unlike those other poor tools of Godfrey Moore's, unlike Moroni and Walstein, you are a man whose instincts and impulses are of a higher order. You are an older soul, and you have fallen lower; therefore your punishment in the next world will be more drastic."

"In this world!" babbled Wells. "In this world, not the next!"

"Because," continued Hafiz, "though you sinned constantly against your better nature, you have not succeeded in entirely extinguishing the little spark of goodness in you. And a small ember may be fanned into a great fire."

"How can I fan it?" whimpered Wells, turning an ashen face up to the other. "God knows I would atone—but it all seemed impossible——"

"Pray, man!" answered the Persian with tremendous emphasis. "'More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.' Pray, as you once prayed when the hopes of life were strong in you! On your knees, man!"

Abner Wells sagged to the floor. His hands were clasped in prayer. From his lips broke the mumbling, half-forgotten invocations. He prayed for pardon, but still more he prayed for life.

It was a terrific scene, the broken man on his knees, and the stern face of the Persian standing over him. Perhaps Sudh Hafiz would have saved him then. But each act must work itself out in the inevitable consequences.

It was growing yet darker in the room. The electric lights still burned, but they seemed to give forth hardly any illumination. Shadows everywhere, and one shadow that detached itself from the other shadows, and hovered, vast and fantasmal, above the doomed man.

Abner Wells suddenly looked up and saw. A faint cry broke from his lips, and then a wild peal of terror, a death-cry that was heard by every other tenant of the apartment house.

His skull shattered, even as Captain Morse's had been, Abner Wells fell dead upon the white and blue Oriental rug, which began rapidly to assume a pattern in another color.

Godfrey Moore has now disposed of his three confederates in crime, and Don seems doomed to expiate the death of Abner Wells upon the scaffold. Lorna is in Moore's power. Can Sudh Hafiz save them at the last and overthrow the arch-criminal? Be sure to order your copy of the November WEIRD TALES from your dealer now.

Red Hands

By AUGUST W. DERLETH and MARK SCHORER

A brief story of two crooks and a hideous fate that befell them in the jungle

THE two men pulled their small launch up on the sandy beach of Churda, three miles off the Indian mainland. Bill Karney, the big one with a build like a pugilist and a face scarred and pock-marked, looked at his partner and ran his greasy hand across his perspiring face.

"We oughta get it all over in one haul, Jerry," he said.

The other nodded. He was a small man, lightly built, with a smooth face that gave an appearance of shrewdness lacking in Karney's. When the boat was well up on the beach, the two of them started across the sand toward the tangled edge of the jungle near by.

"An' remember I gets three-quarters for bumping Weber off," said Karney, looking hard at the other.

Jerry Martin said nothing; there was no expression on his face. But he was thinking, You'll not get three-quarters if I can help it, Karney!

"That wasn't no easy job, you know, Jerry," the big one went on, half apologetically for taking more than his partner would get, half convincing himself that it was not mere greed that provoked his desire for three times Jerry Martin's share.

Jerry Martin was half smiling, thinking, You lumbering idiot, who do you think is the brains of this outfit? Where'd you be without me?

They broke through the dense wall of underbrush and foliage into the jungle and the interior of the island.

Jerry hesitated. "You go ahead, Bill," he said. "You know the way—I don't. It's at the end of this trail, ain't it, Bill?"

Bill Karney, obediently taking the lead, nodded. "Yeah, but it ain't much of a trail."

Jerry Martin found himself now in an environment such as he had never known before. While his experiences in India and the African tropics were in no sense limited, he had never seen vegetation so dense and unusual. Here were trees with leaves like tremendous fans and trunks and limbs like great hairy arms, exotic flowers more beautiful than he had ever dreamed existed. Birds of brilliant plumage swept gracefully and skilfully through the dense forest, calling out in raucous cries to the intruders on this seldom-visited jungle island.

Bill Karney plunged carelessly through the brush, and Jerry followed as best he could. The heat was stifling. It was as if there were great furnaces under the earth, as if the thick leaves of the tropical trees held all the heat close to the ground, not letting it escape into the pale blue sky above. The thick perfume of the flowers and the heavy odor of low swamp regions filled the place with an almost unbearable stench.

"God, it's hot!" Karney muttered.

"Hellish hot," said Jerry.

They stopped to rest. Jerry leaned against a tree and lit a cigarette. Karney sat down, his back braced against a trunk, his legs flung out into the trail.

"How'd you get Weber, Bill?" asked Jerry abruptly.

Bill Karney shrugged. "Followed him up this trail, watched him plant the stuff, and shot him. He fell near the box. I came back. Nobody's been along the trail since then. Nobody's been on the island even."

"Hope not."

Karney seemed uneasy under Jerry Martin's inquisitive stare. "Something bothering you, Bill?" asked Jerry.

"I won't forget Weber—when I got him," said Karney. A grimace of distaste went over his hardened face. "It was awful, Jerry."

Jerry Martin grunted. "What d'you mean?"

"He fell down in the mud; then he got up on his knees and let out an awful bellow. He saw me standing there, holding the smoking gun. He began to yell at me—'Come on and get it, Karney.' Then he started to laugh like crazy—laughed and laughed." Bill Karney paused; his face lost a little of its color at the memory.

"Go on," said Jerry. "Didn't guess I was in on it, too, did he? Say anything else?"

"Nothing that made sense, Jerry. He went crazy, I guess. Said something about hands—red hands, that was it. He yelled at me, 'Come and get the stuff, Karney—and get the red hands, too.' What d'ya suppose he meant by that?"

Jerry Martin shrugged. "Probably getting poetic; meant your bloody hands, red with his blood, most likely."

"Yeah. But why should I get 'em, then? What did he mean by that?"

"Nothing, probably," said Jerry, flicking his cigarette into a pool shortly off the trail. "Maybe he meant you'd give yourself away or something like that and get caught. I don't know. Anyway, he's dead." But looking at Karney, who was now obviously nervous, Jerry went on. "Maybe he meant he'd come back and watch there, Bill. He was always a little bugs on ghosts and things; you know that." He looked shrewdly at his partner, and noted with satisfaction that his tentative shot had told.

"God, Jerry—d'ya think maybe he could come . . . back?"

"Boloney, Bill! What say we get moving?"

"Okeh." Bill Karney got up slowly, not quite as surely as he had moved heretofore. "But suppose he could come back, Jerry—what then?"

For a moment Jerry Martin was sorry he had suggested it. He motioned impatiently toward the trail, saying, "Aw, he won't, Bill. I'm just stringing you. Get along, now."

Once more the two men began their struggle with the tangled underbrush, fighting their way through the jungle in which the seldom-travelled trail helped almost not at all. Karney looked around suddenly. "Wanta go ahead, Jerry?" he asked.

"No. Why?" Jerry Martin was suspicious.

Karney hesitated. "Weber's lying up there ahead—what's left of him, that is. I don't want to see him first, Jerry. He must be pretty far gone by this time."

"Rot," snorted Martin. "Go on ahead!" Looking at his companion's hesitant, frightened face, he thought that Bill Karney would be easy to manage when the time came.

As they went on, Jerry Martin thought back to the beginning of the business. Three months before he had first heard of the man Weber in Calcutta; Weber had brought over one hundred thousand dollars' worth of opium with him from

the interior of India. At that time he had it in Calcutta, hidden in a cheap house in one of the worst streets in that city. Then Weber had been tipped off that the police were on his trail, and, in a desperate attempt to save his forbidden treasure from discovery, had carted it off to Churda, a deserted island about two hundred miles up the coast and three miles from the mainland. It was safe there, because for some reason Churda had a bad reputation among the natives.

Jerry could not remember how he had run into Bill Karney. Probably he had come upon him on a drunk somewhere. At any rate, he had told Karney all about Weber, promising him half the loot if he followed Weber and got him out of the way. The loot would be sold in Calcutta, even at the cost of lower prices, rather than in America, where prices were high, because there was too much danger in smuggling it across.

The rest had been simple enough. Karney and he had followed Weber, and Karney had taken care of Weber while Jerry waited on the beach. That was over two months ago. They had left the stuff on Churda, and gone back to Calcutta; it would not do to bring it back while the police might still be looking for Weber, might even be looking up the men Weber had been seen with.

That Bill Karney was at heart a coward, Jerry Martin now knew. He had asked Bill for the details of the killing of Weber several times, but Karney had never told him before precisely what had taken place in there. Now, as they approached the scene of Weber's death, Bill Karney seemed to have become suddenly terrified again, and under the spell of his fear had blurted out the details, even to the precise words of the crazed dying man, of the murder that had so terrified him. Now, Karney, over six feet tall, with great arms and hulking shoulders, with the strength of a gorilla, was visibly afraid, and his ugly, pock-marked face had gone a sickly yellow with his fear.

Afraid to see what was left of Weber, was he? Jerry Martin chuckled audibly, so that Karney turned quickly, looking apprehensively over his shoulder.

"What's the matter, Jerry?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Jerry.

The two men went on toward the center of the island, crashing through the underbrush and foliage, disturbing strange birds that fluttered in the heavy leaves and called out in their weird voices, stepping down strange red lilies and mauve orchids that grew in their path.

Abruptly Karney stopped. "We're almost there," he said.

"Go on!" snapped Martin.

Karney turned and broke once more through brush and tangle. Jerry Martin came to a stop, throwing a quick glance around him. Then he drew his revolver from his pocket, raised it and took deliberate aim at Karney. The weapon spoke suddenly above the clamor of the birds.

Bill Karney half turned, then crashed to the ground. For a moment Jerry Martin halted, hesitating, waiting to hear whether Karney was dead or not. There was no sound; Jerry had aimed well. A great orange bird rose suddenly from the near-by bushes and moved away with a tremendous flapping of wings. Then all was quiet.

JERRY moved forward cautiously, never once looking back. Bill Karney lay where he had fallen; he was dead. Jerry stepped across the lifeless body and went on, keeping his eyes glued to the barely perceptible trail where Weber had crashed through over two months before. Once he lost it, he knew that he, too, was lost. As he went along he smiled at the mem-

ory of Bill Karney, wanting three-quarters of the loot for himself.

Presently he emerged into a space almost devoid of trees, where vines hung from the bushes and crawled over the miry ground. In the center of the small enclosure he saw a soggy, swampy spot, in which the top of a half-buried box was just visible. That was what he came for.

Jerry Martin stood on the edge of the clearing and mopped his forehead with a dirty handkerchief. Here the atmosphere was more heavy, more nauseous than it had been on the trail, and the heat seemed even more oppressive and stifling. Everything was quiet, unnaturally so. Even the birds seemed to avoid this spot. The quiet was deadly, almost frightening, and he, too, now felt something of the unknown fear that had upset Karney so short a time before. Jerry looked back along the dim trail, almost expecting some one to appear. There was nothing; the silence was tomb-like.

It was then that a new odor came to his nostrils, an odor of rottenness, of putrescence. He pushed his way carefully ahead, peering questioningly before him, and saw what was left of Weber. Jerry Martin jerked his head sharply away, but he was drawn once more to look at what had been Weber, the sight that Karney had so feared to see. He looked at the rotting body that lay not far from his feet, half covered by the jungle's green slime, yet revealing the utterly unrecognizable face of a man, flesh fallen away from the browning bones.

Hesitating there, Jerry Martin thought of the fear Weber had put into Bill Karney by his insane jabbering about "red hands." Coming to think of it, what had Weber meant, anyway? "Get the red hands, too," he had said. That didn't make sense. Was it a warning, or a threat? With a gesture of impatience he brushed through the low hedge of green that circled the spot where the body and half-buried box lay. He noticed at once that there had been no attempt made to bury the box, that it had simply been dropped into the mire.

Then abruptly he felt a sharp, stinging sensation on his arm. An insect, he thought, but when he looked at his arm, he could find no mark, and he remembered that here he had seen neither insect nor bird. He looked at his arm again. With a cry he saw clearly outlined on his flesh, rapidly swelling and growing, a bright red mark—the mark of a hand, as if it had grasped his forearm and pressed so hard that the blood sprang and filled in the marks of palm and fingers. But Jerry knew that there had been no hand, that there could be no hand, for Weber lay before him, and had not moved, would never move again.

He plunged madly forward, and again he felt sharp stinging pains—first in the same arm, then in the other, and again on his back, through his thin shirt. The pain grew suddenly, maddeningly, creeping all along his arms, up to his shoulders and into them. Jerry Martin stood there like a man propped up in death, his eyes bulging, staring before him. He was looking at the peculiar green vines that hedged him in.

They were moving, undulating slowly back and forth, yet coming closer, pressing against him. His eyes sought out the leaves that had touched him, the leaves like human hands—on the undersides were drops of blood—his blood! Even as he stood there, he felt a slow and terrible paralysis creeping into his limbs and upward, straining toward his heart.

He began to sway a little, like the wavering plants surrounding him; then abruptly he fell in the midst of the leaves, feeling them pressing close around him.

He remembered Weber's words now—"Get the red hands, too!"

He lay there for a moment quietly; then he began to struggle to turn over on his back, and after what seemed an eternity of agony, he did so, already feeling his legs useless, paralysis creeping slowly up toward his heart. From all sides, the plant hands were bending toward him.

A great fan-like leaf moved into the line of his vision from above, hovering over his face; then, insidiously, it edged closer, covering his face from his mouth to his eyes, its rubbery surface undulating sensuously, and drew away again.

Jerry Martin wrenched his mouth open, but no sound came. His face was a great red splotch in the black mire; as he lay there, his eyes went slowly up, up, till there were only the blank whites left to stare unseeingly at the pale blue sky above the silent jungle.

The Borgia Ring

By ARTHUR EDWARDS CHAPMAN

A brief story of a murderous thief who stole the poison ring of Cesare Borgia

SLIM JIM HANSARD crossed the floor of the small, barely-furnished room and peered cautiously out of the window. Around the flickering lamp opposite a crowd of uncared-for children were playing their noisy games, while a short distance away a dark, burly figure looked on good-humoredly.

Slim, as his keen eyes caught the glitter of metal buttons, drew quickly back and slowly pulled down the antiquated blind.

"Reckon if that fellow knew who was hangin' round here he wouldn't be proppin' walls up so contented!" he muttered with a nervous laugh.

He turned to the plain wooden table that occupied the center of the room and lit the oil lamp. The yellow glare seemed to heighten the bareness of everything about him, while black, eery shadows flitted, ghost-like, in the distant corners.

"All the same," Slim complained. "I wish I hadn't had to plug the old guy!"

He sank into the single rickety chair and opened a small leather hand-bag that was on the table. He emptied the contents before him, a glittering, rainbow pile of jewelled trinkets, taking up one here and another there, appraising them skilfully.

Then with a quick exclamation he pounced eagerly upon one of the jewels—a massive ring, thickly studded with glorious gems that flashed back at him dazzlingly. Feasting his eyes on the ring, Slim slid it on his finger, only to withdraw it with a sharp cry of pain.

Examining it carefully, he could detect a tiny point that might have been caused by a slight abrasion of the metal. A file would soon put that right, he thought, absently wiping away the ruby globule that had welled up on his finger.

He sat contemplating the treasures greedily. A fortune . . . a fortune such as men had done murder to possess. . . .

Murder!

Slim shuddered and glanced apprehen-

sively around him. The shrill laughter of children at play outside floated to him reassuringly. He was safe enough here. It was three days now since—since it happened. He was safe enough, of course. He would stay here quietly until the affair had blown over, and then with the jewels . . . the finest haul he had ever made and the simplest . . .

If everyone were so careless as the eccentric old collector of rare and antique treasures, Bernard Hamerstein, life would be an easy proposition. It surely had seemed a simple thing . . . and so it would have been if old Hamerstein hadn't been so queer. Who'd have expected the old guy to come snooping round in the middle of the night just to see if his treasures were safe? Another five minutes and Slim would have been clear away and no harm done; but now . . .

Damn it all! Why must he keep thinking about it? He tried to calm himself; but as he slowly swept the jewels back into the bag he saw that his hand trembled. His mouth had become suddenly very dry; his throat was strangely constricted.

"You're safe, Slim . . . safe!" he told himself fiercely.

He hadn't wanted to kill the old man. The fellow had surprized him as he packed the jewels, and, levelling an ancient pistol, had ordered him in thin, quavering tones to throw up his hands. . . .

Slim instead had thrown his gun . . . and Hamerstein had fallen. . . .

Slim drew a shaking hand across his brow as he remembered; and his hand came away wet with perspiration. His heart was pounding frantically. His breathing was growing difficult and painful. He was afraid—deadly afraid of the results of his involuntary act. . . .

He could see it all again with unnerving vividness. Through the blue haze of smoke that rose from the muzzle of his gun he could see old Hamerstein as he lay hunched up on the floor, clawing with weakening fingers at the ever-widening red stain on the left breast of his nightshirt. . . .

"You're a fool, Slim—a fool!" he admonished, striving to shut out the disturbing vision. "There's nothing to be scared of. You're safe enough!"

Mechanically he drew toward him the news-sheet that lay beside the lamp, and turned over the pages with fumbling hands. He would see what the latest news was . . . if the police were baffled. That would help. . . . Ah, here it was:

"Hamerstein Murder," he read haltingly. God! what a horrible sound that word had! "Arrest Expected Shortly."

"Arrest Expected Shortly!"

The words seemed to burn themselves into his brain. Then they knew. They were on his track. All his deadly fears overwhelmed him again; his temples throbbed heavily and his eyes swam mistily as he read on with growing agitation:

"Among the stolen treasures is the celebrated Borgia ring which was Mr. Hamerstein's greatest pride. The ring, which once belonged to the notorious cardinal, contains on its inner rim an infinitesimal needle point which is steeped in a deadly poison. The slightest scratch from this needle is said to have caused death in a few seconds. The ill-fated antiquarian is known always to have handled the ring with the utmost care, as the poison retains much of its evil power even after the lapse of centuries. . . ."

Slim stared at the paragraph with glaring eyes. Needle point . . . deadly poison . . . death! Giant letters danced before him jeeringly. The brown dried streak on his finger leaped into his distorted vision, grimly significant.

Needle point . . . deadly poison . . . death!

A harsh laugh, hysterical, fear-burdened, broke from Slim's parched lips as

he understood. So that was it . . . that was what was wrong with him! And he had thought it was just nerves . . . wind up! But it was poison! He was poisoned . . . and old Hamerstein had the laugh on him . . . damn him!

He staggered clumsily to his feet, clawing wildly at his collar, gasping for air. He laughed again, wildly, a mocking challenge to Death. He sank his teeth deep into his hand as though he would tear away the poisoned flesh. With a choking oath he swept the shabby bag from the table so that its glittering contents poured over the floor.

A massive bejewelled ring rolled to his feet and there rested, winking evilly, malignantly up at him. Cursing horribly, he brought his heel down on the jewel, stamping on it fiercely, madly. Incoherent words rattled in his gullet. His knees failed him, and he plunged heavily forward on his face.

THEY found him lying there next morning, his stiffened fingers clutching at the scattered jewels.

"Heart failure," announced the doctor after a cursory examination.

"Huh?" grunted the police sergeant uninterestedly.

He was gazing curiously at a plain gold ring, set with a single ruby, which he had picked out from the few trinkets that had not fallen from the bag. He handled it carefully, almost mistrustfully.

"Here's that Borgia ring they make such a fuss about," he said. "Poisoned, they say it is."

"Poisoned!" echoed the doctor incredulously. "Well, it looks harmless enough to me, I must say!"

Frankenstein

By MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY

The Story Thus Far

ROBERT WALTON, captain of a ship seeking a passage through the Arctic Ocean, saw a low carriage, fixed on a sledge and drawn by dogs, pass over the ice-field to the north. In it sat a being which had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature.

The next morning, after the ice had broken, he rescued from an ice-field an-

This story began in WEIRD TALES for May

other man, greatly emaciated. Only one of his dogs remained alive, for he had been marooned for some time. The man was Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist, who related to Captain Walton the incredible story of his life and how he came to be on the ice-floe.

Frankenstein had lived in Geneva with his father and his adopted sister, Elizabeth, to whom he was betrothed. His father sent him to school at Ingolstadt with his chum, Henry Clerval. There he progressed in his studies of natural science to such a point that he learned to create life.

Without taking Clerval into his secret, Frankenstein created a monster, eight feet tall and human in appearance, taking his materials from graveyards, slaughter-houses and dissecting-rooms. The monster was so terrible to look upon that Frankenstein fled from it, and the monster escaped.

Abandoned by its creator, the monster made its way to the vicinity of Frankenstein's home, where he murdered Frankenstein's younger brother, William.

Frankenstein met the monster in a hut in the Alps, and there the monster told him how he had learned to talk by observing a peasant family for many months, and how he had changed from a being with good impulses to a malevolent demon because when he revealed himself to the eyes of the peasants by entering their cottage, they had been so horrified by his frightful appearance that they beat him with sticks and drove him away; and all men's hands were raised against the hideous monster.

The monster offered to go to the wilds of South America, away from humankind, if Frankenstein would create a female companion for him, and threatened that if Frankenstein refused, he would destroy not only Frankenstein, but also his family. Horrified, the young scientist escaped to England, with his companion, Henry Clerval.

CHAPTER 19

LONDON was our present point of rest; we determined to remain several months in this wonderful and celebrated city. Clerval desired the intercourse of the men of genius and talent who flourished at this time; but this was with me a secondary object; I was principally occupied with the means of obtaining the information necessary for the completion of my promise, and quickly availed myself of the letters of introduction that I had brought with me, addressed to the most distinguished natural philosophers.

If this journey had taken place during my days of study and happiness, it would have afforded me inexpressible pleasure. But a blight had come over my existence, and I only visited these people for the sake of the information they might give me on the subject in which my interest was so terribly profound. Company was irksome to me; when alone, I could fill my mind with the sights of heaven and earth; the voice of Henry soothed me, and I could thus cheat myself into a transitory peace. But busy uninteresting joyous faces brought back despair to my heart. I saw an insurmountable barrier placed between me and my fellow-men; this barrier was sealed with the blood of William and Justine; and to reflect on the events connected with those names filled my soul with anguish.

But in Clerval I saw the image of my former self; he was inquisitive, and anxious to gain experience and instruction. The difference of manners which he observed was to him an inexhaustible source of instruction and amusement. He was also pursuing an object he had long had in view. His design was to visit India, in

the belief that he had in his knowledge of its various languages, and in the views he had taken of its society, the means of materially assisting the progress of European colonization and trade. In Britain only could he further the execution of his plan. He was for ever busy; and the only check to his enjoyments was my sorrowful and dejected mind. I tried to conceal this as much as possible, that I might not debar him from the pleasures natural to one who was entering on a new scene of life, undisturbed by any care or bitter recollection. I often refused to accompany him, alleging another engagement, that I might remain alone.

I now also began to collect the materials necessary for my new creation, and this was to me like the torture of single drops of water continually falling on the head. Every thought that was devoted to it was an extreme anguish, and every word that I spoke in allusion to it caused my lips to quiver, and my heart to palpitate.

After passing some months in London, we received a letter from a person in Scotland, who had formerly been our visitor at Geneva. He mentioned the beauties of his native country, and asked us if those were not sufficient allurements to induce us to prolong our journey as far north as Perth, where he resided. Clerval eagerly desired to accept this invitation; and I, although I abhorred society, wished to view again mountains and streams, and all the wondrous works with which nature adorns her chosen dwelling-places.

We had arrived in England at the beginning of October, and it was now February. We accordingly determined to commence our journey towards the north at the expiration of another month. In this expedition we did not intend to follow the great road to Edinburgh, but to visit Windsor, Oxford, Matlock, and the Cumberland lakes, resolving to arrive at the completion of this tour about the end of July. I packed up my chemical instruments, and the materials I had collected, resolving to finish my labors in some obscure nook in the northern highlands of Scotland.

We quitted London on the 27th of March, and remained a few days at Windsor, rambling in its beautiful forest. This was a new scene to us mountaineers; the majestic oaks, the quantity of game, and the herds of stately deer, were all novelties to us.

From thence we proceeded to Oxford. As we entered this city, our minds were filled with the remembrance of the events that had been transacted there more than a century and a half before. It was here that Charles I had collected his forces. This city had remained faithful to him, after the whole nation had forsaken his cause to join the standard of parliament and liberty. The memory of that unfortunate king, and his companions, the amiable Falkland, the insolent Goring, his queen, and son, gave a peculiar interest to every part of the city, which they might be supposed to have inhabited. The spirit of elder days found a dwelling here, and we delighted to trace its footsteps.

If these feelings had not found an imaginary gratification, the appearance of the city had yet in itself sufficient beauty to obtain our admiration. The colleges are ancient and picturesque; the streets are almost magnificent; and the lovely Isis, which flows beside it through meadows of exquisite verdure, is spread forth into a placid expanse of waters, which reflects its majestic assemblage of towers, and spires, and domes, embosomed among aged trees.

I enjoyed this scene; and yet my enjoyment was embittered both by the memory of the past and the anticipation of the

future. I was formed for peaceful happiness. During my youthful days discontent never visited my mind; and if I was ever overcome by ennui, the sight of what is beautiful in nature, or the study of what is excellent and sublime in the productions of man, could always interest my heart, and communicate elasticity to my spirits. But I am a blasted tree; the bolt has entered my soul; and I felt then that I should survive to exhibit, what I shall soon cease to be—a miserable spectacle of wrecked humanity, pitiable to others, and intolerable to myself.

We passed a considerable period at Oxford, rambling among its environs, and endeavoring to identify every spot which might relate to the most animating epoch of English history. Our little voyages of discovery were often prolonged by the successive objects that presented themselves. We visited the tomb of the illustrious Hampden, and the field on which that patriot fell. For a moment my soul was elevated from its debasing and miserable fears, to contemplate the divine ideas of liberty and self-sacrifice, of which these sights were the monuments and the remembrancers. For an instant I dared to shake off my chains, and look around me with a free and lofty spirit; but the iron had eaten into my flesh, and I sank again, trembling and hopeless, into my miserable self.

We left Oxford with regret, and proceeded to Matlock, which was our next place of rest. The country in the neighborhood of this village resembled, to a greater degree, the scenery of Switzerland; but everything is on a lower scale, and the green hills want the crown of distant white Alps, which always attend on the piny mountains of my native country. We visited the wondrous cave, and the little cabinets of natural history, where the curiosities are disposed in the same manner as in the collections at Servox and Chamounix. The latter name made me tremble when pronounced by Henry; and I hastened to quit Matlock, with which that terrible scene was thus associated.

From Derby, still journeying northward, we passed two months in Cumberland and Westmoreland. I could now almost fancy myself among the Swiss mountains. The little patches of snow which yet lingered on the northern sides of the mountains, the lakes, and the dashing of the rocky streams, were all familiar and dear sights to me. Here also we made some acquaintances, who almost contrived to cheat me into happiness. The delight of Clerval was proportionably greater than mine; his mind expanded in the company of men of talent, and he found in his own nature greater capacities and resources than he could have imagined himself to have possessed while he associated with his inferiors. "I could pass my life here," said he to me; "and among these mountains I should scarcely regret Switzerland and the Rhine."

But he found that a traveler's life is one that includes much pain amidst its enjoyments. His feelings are for ever on the stretch; and when he begins to sink into repose, he finds himself obliged to quit that on which he rests in pleasure for something new, which again engages his attention, and which also he forsakes for other novelties.

We had scarcely visited the various lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland, and conceived an affection for some of the inhabitants, when the period of our appointment with our Scotch friend approached, and we left them to travel on. For my own part I was not sorry. I had now neglected my promise for some time, and I feared the effects of the

demon's disappointment. He might remain in Switzerland, and wreak his vengeance on my relatives. This idea pursued me, and tormented me at every moment from which I might otherwise have snatched repose and peace. I waited for my letters with feverish impatience: if they were delayed, I was miserable, and overcome by a thousand fears; and when they arrived, and I saw the superscription of Elizabeth or my father, I hardly dared to read and ascertain my fate. Sometimes I thought that the fiend followed me, and might expedite my remissness by murdering my companion. When these thoughts possessed me, I would not quit Henry for a moment, but followed him as his shadow, to protect him from the fancied rage of his destroyer. I felt as if I had committed some great crime, the consciousness of which haunted me. I was guiltless, but I had indeed drawn down a horrible curse upon my head, as mortal as that of crime.

I visited Edinburgh with languid eyes and mind; and yet that city might have interested the most unfortunate being. Clerval did not like it so well as Oxford: for the antiquity of the latter city was more pleasing to him. But the beauty and regularity of the new town of Edinburgh, its romantic castle, and its environs, the most delightful in the world, Arthur's Seat, St. Bernard's Well, and the Pentland Hills, compensated him for the change, and filled him with cheerfulness and admiration. But I was impatient to arrive at the termination of my journey.

We left Edinburgh in a week, passing through Cupar, St. Andrews, and along the banks of the Tay, to Perth, where our friend expected us. But I was in no mood to laugh and talk with strangers, or enter into their feelings or plans with the good humor expected from a guest; and accordingly I told Clerval that I wished to make the tour of Scotland alone. "Do you," said I, "enjoy yourself, and let this be our rendezvous. I may be absent a month or two; but do not interfere with my motions, I entreat you: leave me to peace and solitude for a short time; and when I return, I hope it will be with a lighter heart, more congenial to your own temper."

Henry wished to dissuade me; but, seeing me bent on this plan, ceased to remonstrate. He entreated me to write often. "I had rather be with you," he said, "in your solitary rambles, than with these Scotch people, whom I do not know: hasten then, my dear friend, to return, that I may again feel myself somewhat at home, which I can not do in your absence."

Having parted from my friend, I determined to visit some remote spot of Scotland, and finish my work in solitude. I did not doubt but that the monster followed me, and would discover himself to me when I should have finished, that he might receive his companion.

With this resolution I traversed the northern highlands, and fixed on one of the remotest of the Orkneys as the scene of my labors. It was a place fitted for such a work, being hardly more than a rock, whose high sides were continually beaten upon by the waves. The soil was barren, scarcely affording pasture for a few miserable cows, and oatmeal for its inhabitants, which consisted of five persons, whose gaunt and scraggy limbs gave tokens of their miserable fare. Vegetables and bread, when they indulged in such luxuries, and even fresh water, was to be procured from the mainland, which was about five miles distant.

On the whole island there were but three miserable huts, and one of these was vacant when I arrived. This I hired. It contained but two rooms, and these exhibited all the squalidness of the most

miserable penury. The thatch had fallen in, the walls were unplastered, and the door was off its hinges. I ordered it to be repaired, bought some furniture, and took possession; an incident which would, doubtless, have occasioned some surprize, had not all the senses of the cottagers been benumbed by want and squalid poverty. As it was, I lived ungazed at and unmolested, hardly thanked for the pittance of food and clothes which I gave; so much does suffering blunt even the coarsest sensations of men.

In this retreat I devoted the morning to labor; but in the evening, when the weather permitted, I walked on the stony beach of the sea, to listen to the waves as they roared and dashed at my feet. It was a monotonous yet ever-changing scene. I thought of Switzerland; it was far different from this desolate and appalling landscape. Its hills are covered with vines, and its cottages are scattered thickly in the plains. Its fair lakes reflect a blue and gentle sky; and, when troubled by the winds, their tumult is but as the play of a lively infant, when compared to the roarings of the giant ocean.

In this manner I distributed my occupations when I first arrived; but, as I proceeded in my labor, it became every day more horrible and irksome to me. Sometimes I could not prevail on myself to enter my laboratory for several days; and at other times I toiled day and night in order to complete my work. It was, indeed, a filthy process in which I was engaged. During my first experiment, a kind of enthusiastic frenzy had blinded me to the horror of my employment; my mind was intently fixed on the consummation of my labor, and my eyes were shut to the horror of my proceedings. But now I went to it in cold blood, and my heart often sickened at the work of my hands.

Thus situated, employed in the most detestable occupation, immersed in a solitude where nothing could for an instant call my attention from the actual scene in which I was engaged, my spirits became unequal; I grew restless and nervous. Every moment I feared to meet my persecutor. Sometimes I sat with my eyes fixed on the ground, fearing to raise them, lest they should encounter the object which I so much dreaded to behold. I feared to wander from the sight of my fellow-creatures, lest when alone he should come to claim his companion.

In the meantime I worked on, and my labor was already considerably advanced. I looked towards its completion with a tremulous and eager hope, which I dared not trust myself to question, but which was intermixed with obscure forebodings of evil, that made my heart sicken in my bosom.

CHAPTER 20

I SAT one evening in my laboratory; the sun had set, and the moon was just rising from the sea; I had not sufficient light for my employment, and I remained idle, in a pause of consideration of whether I should leave my labor for the night, or hasten its conclusion by an unremitting attention to it. As I sat, a train of reflection occurred to me, which led me to consider the effects of what I was now doing. Three years before I was engaged in the same manner, and had created a fiend whose unparalleled barbarity had desolated my heart, and filled it for ever with the bitterest remorse. I was now about to form another being, of whose dispositions I was alike ignorant; she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness. He had sworn to quit the neighborhood of man, and hide in deserts; but she had not; and she, who in all probability

was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation. They might even hate each other; the creature who already lived loathed his own deformity, and might he not conceive a greater abhorrence for it when it came before his eyes in the female form? She also might turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him, and he be again alone, exasperated by the fresh provocation of being deserted by one of his own species.

Even if they were to leave Europe, and inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the demon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations? I had before been moved by the sophisms of the being I had created; I had been struck senseless by his fiendish threats: but now, for the first time, the wickedness of my promise burst upon me; I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price, perhaps, of the existence of the whole human race.

I trembled, and my heart failed within me; when, on looking up, I saw, by the light of the moon, the demon at the casement. A ghastly grin wrinkled his lips as he gazed on me, where I sat fulfilling the task which he had allotted to me. Yes, he had followed me in my travels; he had loitered in forests, hid himself in caves, or taken refuge in wide and desert heaths; and he now came to mark my progress, and claim the fulfilment of my promise.

As I looked on him, his countenance expressed the utmost extent of malice and treachery. I thought with a sensation of madness on my promise of creating another like to him, and trembling with passion, tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged. The wretch saw me destroy the creature on whose future existence he depended for happiness, and, with a howl of devilish despair and revenge, withdrew.

I left the room, and, locking the door, made a solemn vow in my own heart never to resume my labors; and then, with trembling steps, I sought my own apartment. I was alone; none were near me to dissipate the gloom, and relieve me from the sickening oppression of the most terrible reveries.

Several hours passed, and I remained near my window gazing on the sea; it was almost motionless, for the winds were hushed, and all nature reposed under the eye of the quiet moon. A few fishing-vessels alone specked the water, and now and then the gentle breeze wafted the sound of voices, as the fishermen called to one another. I felt the silence, although I was hardly conscious of its extreme profundity, until my ear was suddenly arrested by the paddling of oars near the shore, and a person landed close to my house.

In a few minutes after, I heard the creaking of my door, as if some one endeavored to open it softly. I trembled from head to foot; I felt a presentiment of who it was, and wished to rouse one of the peasants who dwelt in a cottage not far from mine; but I was overcome by the sensation of helplessness, so often felt in frightful dreams, when you in vain endeavor to fly from an impending danger, and was rooted to the spot.

Presently I heard the sound of footsteps along the passage; the door opened, and the wretch whom I dreaded appeared.

Shutting the door, he approached me, and said, in a smothered voice——

"You have destroyed the work which you began; what is it that you intend? Do you dare to break your promise? I have endured toil and misery: I left Switzerland with you; I crept along the shores of the Rhine, among its willow islands, and over the summits of its hills. I have dwelt many months in the heaths of England, and among the deserts of Scotland. I have endured incalculable fatigue, and cold, and hunger; do you dare destroy my hopes?"

"Begone! I do break my promise; never will I create another like yourself, equal in deformity and wickedness."

"Slave, I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension. Remember that I have power; you believe yourself miserable, but I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you. You are my creator, but I am your master;—obey!"

"The hour of my irresolution is past, and the period of your power is arrived. Your threats can not move me to do an act of wickedness; but they confirm me in a determination of not creating you a companion in vice. Shall I, in cold blood, set loose upon the earth a demon, whose delight is in death and wretchedness? Begone! I am firm, and your words will only exasperate my rage."

The monster saw my determination in my face, and gnashed his teeth in the impotence of anger. "Shall each man," cried he, "find a wife for his bosom, and each beast have his mate, and I be alone? I had feelings of affection, and they were requited by detestation and scorn. Man! you may hate; but beware! your hours will pass in dread and misery, and soon the bolt will fall which must ravish from you your happiness for ever. Are you to be happy while I grovel in the intensity of my wretchedness? You can blast my other passions; but revenge remains—revenge, henceforth dearer than light or food! I may die; but first you, my tyrant and tormenter, shall curse the sun that gazes on your misery. Beware; for I am fearless, and therefore powerful. I will watch with the wiliness of a snake, that I may sting with its venom. . Man, you shall repent of the injuries you inflict."

"Devil, cease; and do not poison the air with these sounds of malice. I have declared my resolution to you, and I am no coward to bend beneath words. Leave me; I am inexorable."

"It is well. I go; but remember, I shall be with you on your wedding-night."

I started forward, and exclaimed, "Villain! before you sign my death-warrant, be sure that you are yourself safe."

I would have seized him; but he eluded me, and quitted the house with precipitation. In a few moments I saw him in his boat, which shot across the waters with an arrowy swiftness, and was soon lost amidst the waves.

All was again silent; but his words rung in my ears. I burned with rage to pursue the murderer of my peace and precipitate him into the ocean. I walked up and down my room hastily and perturbed, while my imagination conjured up a thousand images to torment and sting me. Why had I not followed him, and closed with him in mortal strife? But I had suffered him to depart, and he had directed his course towards the mainland. I shuddered to think who might be the next victim sacrificed to his insatiate revenge. And then I thought again of his words—*"I will be with you on your wedding-night."* That then was the period fixed for the fulfilment of my destiny. In that hour I should die, and at once satisfy

and extinguish his malice. The prospect did not move me to fear; yet when I thought of my beloved Elizabeth,—of her tears and endless sorrow, when she should find her lover so barbarously snatched from her,—tears, the first I had shed for many months, streamed from my eyes, and I resolved not to fall before my enemy without a bitter struggle.

The night passed away, and the sun rose from the ocean; my feelings became calmer, if it may be called calmness when the violence of rage sinks into the depths of despair. I left the house, the horrid scene of the last night's contention, and walked on the beach of the sea, which I almost regarded as an insuperable barrier between me and my fellow-creatures; nay, a wish that such should prove the fact stole across me. I desired that I might pass my life on that barren rock, wearily, it is true, but uninterrupted by any sudden shock of misery. If I returned, it was to be sacrificed, or to see those whom I most loved die under the grasp of a demon whom I had myself created.

I walked about the isle like a restless specter, separated from all it loved, and miserable in the separation. When it became noon, and the sun rose higher, I lay down on the grass, and was overpowered by a deep sleep. I had been awake the whole of the preceding night, my nerves were agitated, and my eyes inflamed by watching and misery. The sleep into which I now sunk refreshed me; and when I awoke, I again felt as if I belonged to a race of human beings like myself, and I began to reflect upon what had passed with greater composure; yet still the words of the fiend rung in my ears like a death-knell, they appeared like a dream, yet distinct and oppressive as a reality.

The sun had far descended, and I still sat on the shore, satisfying my appetite, which had become ravenous, with an oaten cake, when I saw a fishing-boat land close to me, and one of the men brought me a packet; it contained letters from Geneva, and one from Clerval, entreating me to join him. He said that he was wearing away his time fruitlessly where he was; that letters from the friends he had formed in London desired his return to complete the negotiation they had entered into for his Indian enterprise. He could not any longer delay his departure; but as his journey to London might be followed, even sooner than he now conjectured, by his longer voyage, he entreated me to bestow as much of my society on him as I could spare. He besought me, therefore, to leave my solitary isle, and to meet him at Perth, that we might proceed southwards together. This letter in a degree recalled me to life, and I determined to quit my island at the expiration of two days.

Yet, before I departed, there was a task to perform, on which I shuddered to reflect: I must pack up my chemical instruments; and for that purpose I must enter the room which had been the scene of my odious work, and I must handle those utensils, the sight of which was sickening to me.

The next morning, at daybreak, I summoned sufficient courage, and unlocked the door of my laboratory. The remains of the half-finished creature, whom I had destroyed, lay scattered on the floor, and I almost felt as if I had mangled the living flesh of a human being. I paused to collect myself, and then entered the chamber. With trembling hand I conveyed the instruments out of the room; but I reflected that I ought not to leave the relics of my work to excite the horror and suspicion of the peasants; and I accordingly put them into a basket, with a great quantity of stones, and, laying them up,

determined to throw them into the sea that very night; and in the meantime I sat upon the beach, employed in cleaning and arranging my mechanical apparatus.

Nothing could be more complete than the alteration that had taken place in my feelings since the night of the appearance of the demon. I had before regarded my promise with a gloomy despair, as a thing that, with whatever consequences, must be fulfilled; but I now felt as if a film had been taken from before my eyes, and that I, for the first time, saw clearly. The idea of renewing my labors did not for one instant occur to me; the threat I had heard weighed on my thoughts, but I did not reflect that a voluntary act of mine could avert it. I had resolved in my own mind, that to create another like the fiend I had first made would be an act of the basest and most atrocious selfishness; and I banished from my mind every thought that could lead to a different conclusion.

Between two and three in the morning the moon rose; and I then, putting my basket aboard a little skiff, sailed out about four miles from the shore. The scene was perfectly solitary: a few boats were returning towards land, but I sailed away from them. I felt as if I was about the commission of a dreadful crime, and avoided with shuddering anxiety any encounter with my fellow-creatures. At one time the moon, which had before been clear, was suddenly overspread by a thick cloud, and I took advantage of the moment of darkness, and cast my basket into the sea: I listened to the gurgling sound as it sunk, and then sailed away from the spot.

The sky became clouded; but the air was pure, although chilled by the northeast breeze that was then rising. But it refreshed me, and filled me with such agreeable sensations, that I resolved to prolong my stay on the water; and, fixing the rudder in a direct position, stretched myself at the bottom of the boat. Clouds hid the moon, everything was obscure, and I heard only the sound of the boat, as its keel cut through the waves; the murmur lulled me, and in a short time I slept soundly.

I do not know how long I remained in this situation, but when I awoke I found that the sun had already mounted considerably. The wind was high, and the waves continually threatened the safety of my little skiff. I found that the wind was northeast, and must have driven me far from the coast from which I had embarked. I endeavored to change my course, but quickly found that, if I again made the attempt, the boat would be instantly filled with water. Thus situated, my only resource was to drive before the wind. I confess that I felt a few sensations of terror. I had no compass with me, and was so slenderly acquainted with the geography of this part of the world that the sun was of little benefit to me. I might be driven into the wide Atlantic, and feel all the tortures of starvation, or be swallowed up in the immeasurable waters that roared and buffeted around me. I had already been out many hours, and felt the torment of a burning thirst, a prelude to my other sufferings. I looked on the heavens, which were covered by clouds that flew before the wind, only to be replaced by others: I looked upon the sea, it was to be my grave.

"Fiend," I exclaimed, "your task is already fulfilled!" I thought of Elizabeth, of my father, and of Clerval; all left behind, on whom the monster might satisfy his sanguinary and merciless passions. This idea plunged me into a revery, so despairing and frightful, that even now, when the scene is on the point of closing

before me for ever, I shudder to reflect on it.

Some hours passed thus; but by degrees, as the sun declined towards the horizon, the wind died away into a gentle breeze, and the sea became free from breakers. but these gave place to a heavy swell: I felt sick, and hardly able to hold the rudder, when suddenly I saw a line of high land towards the south.

Almost spent, as I was, by fatigue, and the dreadful suspense I endured for several hours, this sudden certainty of life rushed like a flood of warm joy to my heart, and tears gushed from my eyes.

How mutable are our feelings, and how strange is that clinging love we have of life in the excess of misery! I constructed another sail with a part of my dress, and eagerly steered my course towards the land. It had a wild and rocky appearance; but, as I approached nearer, I easily perceived the traces of cultivation. I saw vessels near the shore, and found myself suddenly transported back to the neighborhood of civilized man. I carefully traced the windings of the land, and hailed a steeple which I at length saw issuing from behind a small promontory.

As I was in a state of extreme debility, I resolved to sail directly towards the town, as a place where I could most easily procure nourishment. Fortunately I had money with me. As I turned the promontory, I perceived a small neat town and a good harbor, which I entered, my heart bounding with joy at my unexpected escape.

As I was occupied in fixing the boat and arranging the sails, several people crowded towards the spot. They seemed much surprized at my appearance; but, instead of offering me any assistance, whispered together with gestures that at any other time might have produced in me a slight sensation of alarm. As it was, I merely remarked that they spoke English; and I therefore addressed them in that language: "My good friends," said I, "will you be so kind as to tell me the name of this town, and inform me where I am?"

"You will know that soon enough," replied a man with a hoarse voice. "Maybe you are come to a place that will not prove much to your taste; but you will not be consulted as to your quarters, I promise you."

I was exceedingly surprized on receiving so rude an answer from a stranger; and I was also disconcerted on perceiving the frowning and angry countenances of his companions. "Why do you answer me so roughly?" I replied; "surely it is not the custom of Englishmen to receive strangers so inhospitably."

"I do not know," said the man, "what the custom of the English may be; but it is the custom of the Irish to hate villains."

While this strange dialogue continued, I perceived the crowd rapidly increase. Their faces expressed a mixture of curiosity and anger, which annoyed, and in some degree alarmed me. I inquired the way to the inn; but no one replied. I then moved forward, and a murmuring sound arose from the crowd as they followed and surrounded me; when an ill-looking man approached, tapped me on the shoulder, and said, "Come, sir, you must follow me to Mr. Kirwin's, to give an account of yourself."

"Who is Mr. Kirwin? Why am I to give an account of myself? Is not this a free country?"

"Ay, sir, free enough for honest folks. Mr. Kirwin is a magistrate; and you are to give an account of the death of a gentleman who was found murdered here last night."

This answer startled me; but I presently recovered myself. I was innocent; that

could easily be proved: accordingly I followed my conductor in silence, and was led to one of the best houses in the town. I was ready to sink from fatigue and hunger; but, being surrounded by a crowd, I thought it politic to rouse all my strength, that no physical debility might be construed into apprehension or conscious guilt. Little did I then expect the calamity that was in a few moments to overwhelm me, and extinguish in horror and despair all fear of ignominy or death.

I must pause here; for it requires all my fortitude to recall the memory of the frightful events which I am about to relate, in proper detail, to my recollection.

CHAPTER 21

I was soon introduced into the presence of the magistrate, an old benevolent man, with calm and mild manners. He looked upon me, however, with some degree of severity: and then, turning towards my conductors, he asked who appeared as witnesses on this occasion.

About half a dozen men came forward; and one being selected by the magistrate, he deposed that he had been out fishing the night before with his son and brother-in-law, Daniel Nugent, when, about ten o'clock, they observed a strong northerly blast rising, and they accordingly put in for port. It was a very dark night, as the moon had not yet risen; they did not land at the harbor, but, as they had been accustomed, at a creek about two miles below. He walked on first, carrying a part of the fishing tackle, and his companions followed him at some distance. As he was proceeding along the sands, he struck his foot against something, and fell at his length on the ground. His companions came up to assist him; and, by the light of their lantern, they found that he had fallen on the body of a man who was to all appearances dead. Their first supposition was that it was the corpse of some person who had been drowned, and was thrown on shore by the waves; but, on examination, they found that the clothes were not wet, and even that the body was not then cold. They instantly carried it to the cottage of an old woman near the spot, and endeavored, but in vain, to restore it to life. It appeared to be a handsome young man, about five and twenty years of age. He had apparently been strangled; for there was no sign of any violence, except the black mark of fingers on his neck.

The first part of this deposition did not in the least interest me; but when the mark of the fingers was mentioned, I remembered the murder of my brother, and felt myself extremely agitated; my limbs trembled, and a mist came over my eyes, which obliged me to lean on a chair for support. The magistrate observed me with a keen eye, and of course drew an unfavorable augury from my manner.

The son confirmed his father's account: but when Daniel Nugent was called, he swore positively that, just before the fall of his companion, he saw a boat, with a single man in it, at a short distance from the shore; and, as far as he could judge by the light of a few stars, it was the same boat in which I had just landed.

A woman deposed that she lived near the beach, and was standing at the door of her cottage, waiting for the return of the fishermen, about an hour before she heard of the discovery of the body, when she saw a boat, with only one man in it, push off from that part of the shore where the corpse was afterwards found.

Another woman confirmed the account of the fishermen having brought the body into her house; it was not cold. They put it into a bed, and rubbed it; and Daniel went to the town for an apothecary, but life was quite gone.

Several other men were examined con-

cerning my landing; and they agreed that, with the strong north wind that had arisen during the night, it was very probable that I had beaten about for many hours, and had been obliged to return nearly to the same spot from which I had departed. Besides, they observed that it appeared that I had brought the body from another place, and it was likely that, as I did not appear to know the shore, I might have put into the harbor ignorant of the distance of the town of ——— from the place where I had deposited the corpse.

Mr. Kerwin, on hearing this evidence, desired that I should be taken into the room where the body lay for interment, that it might be observed what effect the sight of it would produce upon me. This idea was probably suggested by the extreme agitation I had exhibited when the mode of the murder had been described. I was accordingly conducted, by the magistrate and several other persons, to the inn. I could not help being struck by the strange coincidences that had taken place during this eventful night; but knowing that I had been conversing with several persons in the island I had inhabited about the time that the body had been found, I was perfectly tranquil as to the consequences of the affair.

I entered the room where the corpse lay, and was led up to the coffin. How can I describe my sensations on beholding it? I feel yet parched with horror, nor can I reflect on that terrible moment without shuddering and agony. The examination, the presence of the magistrate and witnesses, passed like a dream from my memory, when I saw the lifeless form of Henry Clerval stretched before me. I gasped for breath; and, throwing myself on the body, I exclaimed, "Have my murderous machinations deprived you also, my dearest Henry, of life? Two I have already destroyed; other victims await their destiny: but you, Clerval, my friend, my benefactor——"

The human frame could no longer support the agonies that I endured, and I was carried out of the room in strong convulsions.

A FEVER succeeded to this. I lay for two months on the point of death: my ravings, as I afterwards heard, were frightful; I called myself the murderer of William, of Justine, and of Clerval. Sometimes I entreated my attendants to assist me in the destruction of the fiend by whom I was tormented; and at others I felt the fingers of the monster already grasping my neck, and screamed aloud with agony and terror. Fortunately, as I spoke my native language, Mr. Kirwin alone understood me; but my gestures and bitter cries were sufficient to affright the other witnesses.

Why did I not die? More miserable than man ever was before, why did I not sink into forgetfulness and rest? Death snatches away many blooming children, the only hopes of their doting parents: how many brides and youthful lovers have been one day in the bloom of health and hope, and the next a prey for worms and the decay of the tomb! Of what materials was I made, that I could thus resist so many shocks, which, like the turning of the wheel, continually renewed the torture?

But I was doomed to live; and, in two months, found myself as awaking from a dream, in a prison, stretched on a wretched bed, surrounded by jailers, turnkeys, bolts, and all the miserable apparatus of a dungeon. It was morning, I remember, when I thus awoke to understanding: I had forgotten the particulars of what had happened, and only felt as if some great misfortune had suddenly overwhelmed me; but when I looked around, and saw

the barred windows, and the squalidness of the room in which I was, all flashed across my memory, and I groaned bitterly.

This sound disturbed an old woman who was sleeping in a chair beside me. She was a hired nurse, the wife of one of the turnkeys, and her countenance expressed all those bad qualities which often characterize that class. The lines of her face were hard and rude, like that of persons accustomed to see without sympathizing in sights of misery. Her tone expressed her entire indifference; she addressed me in English, and the voice struck me as one that I had heard during my sufferings:—

"Are you better now, sir?" said she.

I replied in the same language, with a feeble voice, "I believe I am; but if it be all true, if indeed I did not dream, I am sorry that I am still alive to feel this misery and horror."

"For that matter," replied the old woman, "if you mean about the gentleman you murdered, I believe that it were better for you if you were dead, for I fancy it will go hard with you! However, that's none of my business; I am sent to nurse you, and get you well; I do my duty with a safe conscience; it were well if everybody did the same."

I turned with loathing from the woman who could utter so unfeeling a speech to a person just saved, on the very edge of death; but I felt languid, and unable to reflect on all that had passed. The whole series of my life appeared to me as a dream; I sometimes doubted if indeed it were all true, for it never presented itself to my mind with the force of reality.

As the images that floated before me became more distinct, I grew feverish; a darkness pressed around me: no one was near me who soothed me with the gentle voice of love; no dear hand supported me. The physician came and prescribed medicines, and the old woman prepared them for me; but utter carelessness was visible in the first, and the expression of brutality was strongly marked in the visage of the second. Who could be interested in the fate of a murderer, but the hangman who would gain his fee?

These were my first reflections; but I soon learned that Mr. Kirwin had shown me extreme kindness. He had caused the best room in the prison to be prepared for me (wretched indeed was the best); and it was he who had provided a physician and a nurse. It is true, he seldom came to see me; for, although he ardently desired to relieve the sufferings of every human creature, he did not wish to be present at the agonies and miserable ravings of a murderer. He came, therefore, sometimes, to see that I was not neglected; but his visits were short, and with long intervals.

One day, while I was gradually recovering, I was seated in a chair, my eyes half open, and my cheeks livid like those in death. I was overcome by gloom and misery, and often reflected I had better seek death than desire to remain in a world which to me was replete with wretchedness. At one time I considered whether I should not declare myself guilty, and suffer the penalty of the law, less innocent than poor Justine had been. Such were my thoughts when the door of my apartment was opened and Mr. Kirwin entered. His countenance expressed sympathy and compassion; he drew a chair close to mine, and addressed me in French——

"I fear that this place is very shocking to you; can I do anything to make you more comfortable?"

"I thank you; but all that you mention is nothing to me: on the whole earth there

is no comfort which I am capable of receiving."

"I know that the sympathy of a stranger can be but of little relief to one borne down as you are by so strange a misfortune. But you will, I hope, soon quit this melancholy abode; for, doubtless, evidence can easily be brought to free you from the criminal charge."

"That is my least concern: I am, by a course of strange events, become the most miserable of mortals. Persecuted and tortured as I am and have been, can death be any evil to me?"

"Nothing indeed could be more unfortunate and agonizing than the strange chances that have lately occurred. You were thrown, by some surprizing accident, on this shore renowned for its hospitality, seized immediately, and charged with murder. The first sight that was presented to your eyes was the body of your friend, murdered in so unaccountable a manner, and placed, as it were, by some fiend across your path."

As Mr. Kirwin said this, notwithstanding the agitation I endured on this retrospect of my sufferings, I also felt considerable surprize at the knowledge he seemed to possess concerning me. I suppose some astonishment was exhibited in my countenance; for Mr. Kirwin hastened to say——

"Immediately upon your being taken ill, all the papers that were on your person were brought me, and I examined them that I might discover some trace by which I could send to your relations an account of your misfortune and illness. I found several letters, and, among others, one which I discovered from its commencement to be from your father. I instantly wrote to Geneva: nearly two months have elapsed since the departure of my letter.—But you are ill; even now you tremble: you are unfit for agitation of any kind."

"This suspense is a thousand times worse than the most horrible event: tell me what new scene of death has been acted, and whose murder I am now to lament?"

"Your family is perfectly well," said Mr. Kirwin, with gentleness; "and some one, a friend, is come to visit you."

I know not by what chain of thought the idea presented itself, but it instantly darted into my mind that the murderer had come to mock at my misery, and taunt me with the death of Clerval, as a new incitement for me to comply with his hellish desires. I put my hand before my eyes and cried out in agony——

"Oh! take him away! I can not see him; for God's sake do not let him enter!"

Mr. Kirwin regarded me with a troubled countenance. He could not help regarding my exclamation as a presumption of my guilt, and said, in rather a severe tone——

"I should have thought, young man, that the presence of your father would have been welcome instead of inspiring such violent repugnance."

"My father!" cried I, while every feature and every muscle was relaxed from anguish to pleasure: "is my father indeed come? How kind, how very kind! But where is he, why does he not hasten to me?"

My change of manner surprized and pleased the magistrate; perhaps he thought that my former exclamation was a momentary return of delirium, and now he instantly resumed his former benevolence. He rose and quitted the room with my nurse, and in a moment my father entered it.

Nothing, at this moment, could have given me greater pleasure than the arrival of my father. I stretched out my hand to him and cried——

"Are you then safe—and Elizabeth—and Ernest?"

My father calmed me with assurances of their welfare, and endeavored, by dwelling on these subjects so interesting to my heart, to raise my desponding spirits; but he soon felt that a prison can not be the abode of cheerfulness.

"What a place is this that you inhabit, my son!" said he, looking mournfully at the barred windows and wretched appearance of the room. "You travelled to seek happiness, but a fatality seems to pursue you. And poor Clerval——"

The name of my unfortunate and murdered friend was an agitation too great to be endured in my weak state; I shed tears.

"Alas! yes, my father," replied I; "some destiny of the most horrible kind hangs over me, and I must live to fulfil it, or surely I should have died on the coffin of Henry."

We were not allowed to converse for any length of time, for the precarious state of my health rendered every precaution necessary that could insure tranquillity. Mr. Kirwin came in and insisted that my strength should not be exhausted by too much exertion. But the appearance of my father was to me like that of my good angel, and I gradually recovered my health.

As my sickness quitted me, I was absorbed by a gloomy and black melancholy that nothing could dissipate. The image of Clerval was for ever before me, ghastly and murdered. More than once the agitation into which these reflections threw me made my friends dread a dangerous relapse. Alas! why did they preserve so miserable and detested a life? It was surely that I might fulfil my destiny, which is now drawing to a close. Soon, oh! very soon, will death extinguish these throbbings, and relieve me from the mighty weight of anguish that bears me to the dust; and, in executing the award of justice, I shall also sink to rest. Then the appearance of death was distant although the wish was ever present to my thoughts; and I often sat for hours motionless and speechless, wishing for some mighty revolution that might bury me and my destroyer in its ruins.

The season of the assizes approached. I had already been three months in prison; and although I was still weak, and in continual danger of a relapse, I was obliged to travel nearly a hundred miles to the county-town where the court was held. Mr. Kirwin charged himself with every care of collecting witnesses and arranging my defense. I was spared the disgrace of appearing publicly as a criminal, as the case was not brought before the court that decides on life and death. The grand jury rejected the bill on its being proved that I was on the Orkney Islands at the hour the body of my friend was found; and a fortnight after my removal I was liberated from prison.

My father was enraptured on finding me freed from the vexations of a criminal charge, that I was again allowed to breathe the fresh atmosphere, and permitted to return to my native country. I did not participate in these feelings; for to me the walls of a dungeon or a palace were alike hateful. The cup of life was poison for ever; and although the sun shone upon me as upon the happy and gay of heart, I saw around me nothing but a dense and frightful darkness, penetrated by no light but the glimmer of two eyes that glared upon me. Sometimes they were the expressive eyes of Henry languishing in death, the dark orbs nearly covered by the lids, and the long black lashes that fringed them; sometimes it was the watery, clouded eyes of the

(Please turn to page 575)

A PLEA for more stories of weird science comes from F. Shroye, of Decatur, Indiana, who writes to the Eyrie: "I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES for quite a while. My reason for reading your publication is that I am a collector of science-fiction stories. In the past years you have published many masterpieces of this type; for instance, *The Giant World, Explorers Into Infinity, The Time-Raider, Crashing Suns,* etc. But lately you have been printing fewer and fewer of this type; and in your August issue there was none which could really be classed as science-fiction, with the exception of a few-page installment of Frankenstein. I almost wished that I could travel backward in time when you printed those science-fiction serials by Hamilton, Cummings, Russell, and others of the like. Those *were* the days! I remember how I used to haunt the news stands before the first of the month in the optimistic hope that W. T. would appear a day or two earlier, wanting to see if the universe had been saved or if the men from Mars had conquered the earth and so on. But now! Ouch! W. T. seems to be degenerating into a second 'Ghost Stories.' Pep up, Mr. Editor! Let's get back to the policy of the old days, let's have invaders from the moon, comet creatures and the other attractions of the old days." [Mr. Shroye will be pleased to know that we have a splendid list of weird-scientific stories for early publication. Edmond Hamilton has written for us some thrilling stories about Kaldar, a planet revolving about the star Antares. Next month will appear *Spawn of the Shadows,* by William H. Pope—a striking tale of a voyage to the moon and the strange beings that haunt its dark caves. And for six issues you will be entertained by that master-hand of science-fiction, Otis Adelbert Kline, whose novel, *Buccaneers of Venus,* will be printed serially, beginning in our November issue.—THE EDITORS.]

"In the current issue (July), Victor Rousseau's new serial, *The Phantom Hand,* starts off very well," writes Duke Williamson, of Springfield, Massachusetts. "It promises to be a truly unusual story. Robert E. Howard's Solomon Kane adventure, *Wings in the Night,* is up to this author's highest standard, and that is saying a good deal. *House of the Lizard* shows up well, although it weakens somewhat toward the end. *The Planet of Peace* and *The Man Who Never Came Back* are both very good tales. And a word in praise of that superb poem, *Night Specters,* by Kirke Mechem—a ghostly night-picture vividly and eloquently drawn, and showing genuine inspiration. Poems like this are important contributions to weird literature. I consider it among the very best things of its kind you have ever printed. And while on the subject of poems, I would like also to commend highly Cristel Hastings' *Mystery* in

the May issue. In my opinion it is the best piece of work by this writer you have published, excepting only *The Phantom*, which appeared some four years ago. In the May number I noticed a Hugh Rankin illustration for the first time in nearly two years. His impressionistic and imaginative drawings are real additions to any issue in which they appear."

J. D. Arden, of Detroit, writes to the Eyrie: "I was right glad to welcome E. Hoffmann Price back to the fold of WEIRD TALES writers. He has come back in a big way. If it weren't for the Jules de Grandin story, *Bride of the Peacock* would be my choice for the best story in the current issue. But whenever Jules is prancing in WEIRD TALES, there is only H. P. Lovecraft who can beat him out of first place. Clark Ashton Smith's excellent story, *The Maker of Gargoyles*, is another wonderful tale. Smith has rapidly taken his place among the foremost writers of weird tales. It surprizes me greatly that no one commented in the Eyrie on Greye La Spina's gripping werewolf tale, *The Devil's Pool*, which was the best story I have read since Mashburn's *The Vengeance of Ixmal* was published."

"Congratulations on the latest W. T.," writes W. B. Talman, from Spring Valley, New York. "I'm sure that no other pulp magazine can begin to compare with its typographical appearance and general effectiveness. Your new artist's technique blends very well with the tone of the magazine, and the last few covers are not nearly so stiff and gaudy as those that preceded them. I like Long's story, *The Brain-Eaters*, in the issue before last about as well as anything he's written. Quinn's serial, *The Devil's Bride*, was a knockout. Seems to me your magazine is hitting an unusual standard these days when most publishers are raking the bottom of the 'ice-box' for material they have been holding in uncertainty—or so the rumors have it."

A letter from Clifford Kornoelje says: "Having been a reader of WEIRD TALES ever since its inception in 1923 I feel qualified to comment on it. When the magazine was started it was something new in the magazine field. Consequently the stories, with a few exceptions, were rather poorly written. Now WEIRD TALES is in its tenth year. Its tales are of a fine high quality. That is something most pulp paper magazines can't brag about. A good many authors, now well known, got their start in WEIRD TALES. Victor Rousseau's new serial is certainly going to be an eery tale. I got some good thrills out of the first part. Fantastic tales are my meat. Keep on printing them."

"Being at leisure this evening, I want to express a few opinions in the Eyrie for the first time in the five or six years I have read your magazine," writes W. H. Corson, of Hollywood, California. "More particularly, I write to implore you to inflict no more banal, slow-moving, Victorian tripe such as *Frankenstein* upon your faithful readers. It is readily available almost anywhere and, too, you seem to have lost sight of the fact that we do not thrill as easily as readers did in the infancy of weird fiction. The mildest conceptions of Robert E. Howard (on whose head be peace!) would have probably caused governmental upheavals in the time of the too emotional Mrs. Shelley. In a word, no reprints save from W. T.! Why not something utterly alien in conception, such as *The Red Brain* of Donald Wandrei, and the earlier stories of Nictzin Dyalhis?"

"Give us more weird-scientific stories, and by all means publish *Dracula*," writes

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Coming Next Month

THE man was dead, on doubt of it. No one, not even the most accomplished contortionist, could twist his neck at that sharp angle. And the manner of his death was obvious. Frightened at sight of the mummy, the poor fellow had tried to effect a hasty exit by the open window, had slipped upon the sleet-glazed roof of the bay window and fallen to the ground, striking head-first and skiding forward with his full weight on his twisted neck.

I voiced my conclusions hastily, but de Grandin shook a puzzled head. "One understands the manner of his death," he answered thoughtfully, "but the reason, that is something else again. We can well think that such a creature would have a paralyzing fear when he beheld the mummy stretched upon the table, but that does not explain the antics he went through before he fell or jumped back through the window he had forced. We heard him thrash about; we heard him kick the furniture; we heard him scream with mirthless laughter. For why? Frightened men may scream, they sometimes even laugh hysterically, but what was there for him to wrestle with?"

"That's just what Larson did!" Professor Ellis put in hastily. "Don't you remember——"

"Exactly," the Frenchman answered with a troubled frown. "Professor Larson cries aloud and fights with nothing; this luckless burglar breaks into the very room where Professor Larson died so strange a death, and he, too, wrestles with the empty air and falls to death while laughing hideously. There is something very devilish here, my friends." . . .

The ghastly thing that happened in the room where the mummy lay will be fascinatingly told in a brilliant adventure of Jules de Grandin, printed complete in the November WEIRD TALES:

THE BLEEDING MUMMY

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A startling story of a flight to the Moon, and weird perils among the ghastly creatures that inhabit it.

November WEIRD TALES Out October 1

(Continued from page 572)

Carl Johnson, of Danville, Virginia. "*The Devil's Pool* was what I call good reading, and *The Weird of Avoosl Wuthoqquan* was superb in its vivid description."

Writes M. Davis, of Brooklyn, New York: "I have been reading your magazine for many years. Why not issue a collection of your best stories—Howard, Lovecraft, Hamilton—in book form?"

"*The Devil's Bride* certainly had a crashing conclusion," writes Hyman Vinunsky, of Cleveland. "What an ending! Mr. Quinn is a great author. And *The Phantom Hand* is wonderful—at least the first installment is. *Wings in the Night*, by Robert E. Howard, suits me very much. It is very weird and eery. I always like stories with weird atmosphere."

Clark Ashton Smith writes: "Apropos of the reprint question, I'd like to cast my vote against stories of serial length, particularly those that are well known to lovers of the weird. I'd like to see more stories from earlier issues of W. T., as well as other rare items that are difficult to procure. The reprinting of excellent out-of-the-way tales would be a signal service to readers."

"I enjoyed Robert E. Howard's *Wings in the Night* exceedingly," writes H. W. Munn, of Athol, Massachusetts. "It made a deeper impression upon me than any other of his stories I have seen."

In this issue appears *Kishi, My Cat*, the last of the poems written by Alice I'Anson, gifted young poetess. Her untimely death cut short a literary career of great promise. Readers of WEIRD TALES will recall her excellent poems which have been published in this magazine.

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The most popular story in the August issue, as shown by your letters and votes, is *Bride of the Peacock*, E. Hoffmann Price's story of devil-worship. This story is closely pressed for first place by the second installment of Victor Rousseau's serial, *The Phantom Hand*.

My favorite stories in the October WEIRD TALES are:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)---------- Why?----------

(2)---------- ----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

Frankenstein

(Continued from page 570)

monster as I first saw them in my chamber at Ingolstadt.

My father tried to awaken in me the feelings of affection. He talked of Geneva, which I should soon visit—of Elizabeth and Ernest; but these words only drew deep groans from me. Sometimes, indeed, I felt a wish for happiness; and thought, with melancholy delight, of my beloved cousin; or longed, with a devouring *maladie du pays,* to see once more the blue lake and rapid Rhone that had been so dear to me in early childhood: but my general state of feeling was a torpor in which a prison was as welcome a residence as the divinest scene in nature; and these fits were seldom interrupted but by paroxysms of anguish and despair. At these moments I often endeavored to put an end to the existence I loathed; and it required unceasing attendance and vigilance to restrain me from committing some dreadful act of violence.

Yet one duty remained to me, the recollection of which finally triumphed over my selfish despair. It was necessary that I should return without delay to Geneva, there to watch over the lives of those I so fondly loved; and to lie in wait for the murderer, that if any chance led me to the place of his concealment, or if he dared again to blast me by his presence, I might, with unfailing aim, put an end to the existence of the monstrous Image which I had endued with the mockery of a soul still more monstrous. My father still desired to delay our departure, fearful that I could not sustain the fatigues of a journey: for I was a shattered wreck—the shadow of a human being. My strength was gone. I was a mere skeleton; and fever night and day preyed upon my wasted frame.

Still, as I urged our leaving Ireland

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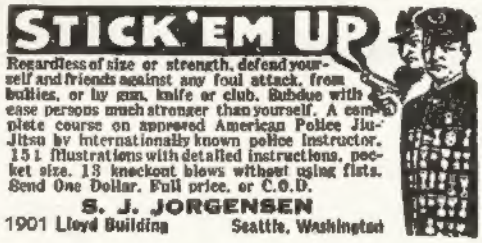

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with such inquietude and impatience, my father thought it best to yield. We took our passage on board a vessel bound for Havre-de-Grace, and sailed with a fair wind from the Irish shores. It was midnight. I lay on the deck looking at the stars and listening to the dashing of the waves. I hailed the darkness that shut Ireland from my sight; and my pulse beat with a feverish joy when I reflected that I should soon see Geneva. The past appeared to me in the light of a frightful dream; yet the vessel in which I was, the wind that blew me from the detested shore of Ireland, and the sea which surrounded me, told me too forcibly that I was deceived by no vision, and that Clerval had fallen a victim to me and the monster of my creation.

Ever since my recovery from the fever I had been in the custom of taking every night a small quantity of laudanum; for it was by means of this drug only that I was enabled to gain the rest necessary for the preservation of life. Oppressed by the recollection of my various misfortunes, I now swallowed double my usual quantity and soon slept profoundly. But sleep did not afford me respite from thought and misery; my dreams presented a thousand objects that scared me. Towards morning I was possessed by a kind of nightmare; I felt the fiend's grasp in my neck, and could not free myself from it; groans and cries rung in my ears. My father, who was watching over me, perceiving my restlessness, awoke me; the dashing waves were around: the cloudy sky above; the fiend was not here: a sense of security, a feeling that a truce was established between the present hour and the irresistible, disastrous future, imparted to me a kind of calm forgetfulness, of which the human mind is by its structure peculiarly susceptible.

(To be continued next month)

W. T.—9

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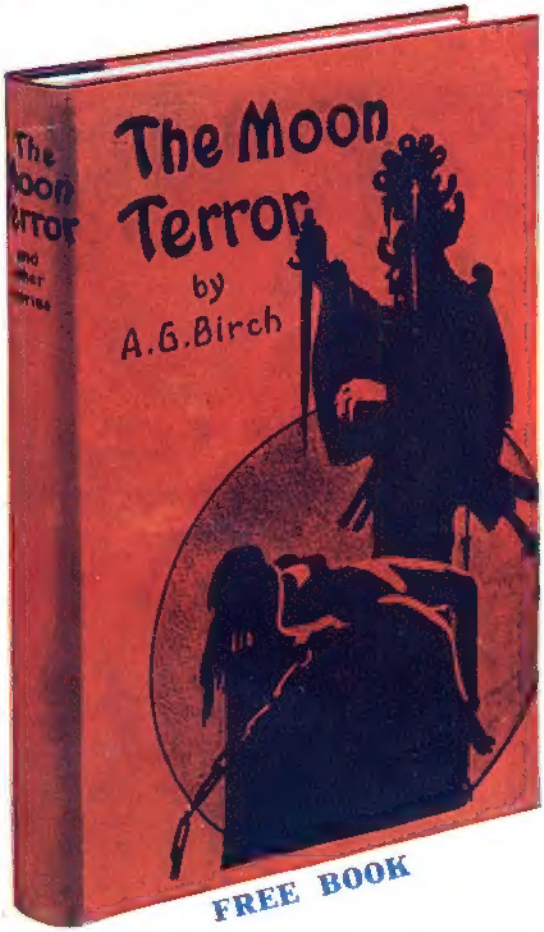

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